SEX, POLITICS, AND RELIGION IN STAR WARS

AN ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY

DOUGLAS BRODE AND LEAH DEYNEKA

Sex, Politics, and Religion in *Star Wars*

An Anthology

Edited by
Douglas Brode
Leah Deyneka



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For my son, Shane Johnson Brode,
the original *Star Wars* kid.

—Douglas Brode



To my parents, Joe and Judy, and my sisters,
Elisa, Larissa, and Tammy, who have
tirelessly bolstered my *Star Wars* obsession.
Thank you also to Professor Douglas Brode for
creating such a fantastic *Star Wars* course and
proposing the idea for this anthology.

—Leah Deyneka

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—Leah Deyneka

Introduction

Douglas Brode

If it were a person rather than a film, the first *Star Wars* movie, *Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977), would now have to be considered middle-aged. Yet while it's more than thirty-five years old, young people of the twenty-first century clearly have no problem relating to this or any of its five sequels and prequels, as well as the extensive franchising: video games, graphic novels, and what often appears to be more toys than are stars in the heavens, to name only a few elements that constitute the enormous, ongoing *S.W.* entertainment cosmos. That in itself seems significant, as this doesn't hold true for the majority of that era's films including top-quality works that were considered of far greater importance as to social impact, ambitious scope, and seriousness of intent, and therefore more likely to remain relevant and thrive in the public consciousness. Yet other than a few budding film historians, not many people under the age of twenty-one have heard of, much less seen, such Best Picture of the Year Oscar contenders as *Serpico* (1973), *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), *Nashville* (1975), *All the President's Men* (1976), *Julia* (1977), *Coming Home* (1978), *All That Jazz* (1979), and *Ordinary People* (1980). However high their quality then or in retrospect, they fail to speak loud and clear across the intervening decades.

That does hold true, however, for this once marginal project that, late in 1974, a then-young filmmaker named George Lucas pitched to 20th Century Fox. Yes, *Star Wars* did pack a wallop at the box office when released in the summer of 1977. At the time, every child in America wanted a lightsaber or, if his parents could afford something far more expensive, a Darth Vader helmet. And of course there were the action figures, the originals now valuable collector's items. No question, then, *Star Wars did* rate, beyond any normal notion of even a highly successful film, as a true phenomenon.

Yet back in the fall of 1954, much the same thing had happened with coonskin caps after Walt Disney broadcast his *Davy Crockett* TV shows and a catchy ballad played endlessly on the radio. By the following summer the whole thing had died down. Those children had turned into teenagers who were now all abuzz about Elvis Presley. A year after it appeared, Crockett was the stuff of nostalgia.

In retrospect, the Crockett craze may still appeal to baby boomers who experienced it firsthand, today recalling that phenomenon as a charming aberration from their youth. But merchandise and other items left over from that time do not fetch a high price on eBay. The first wave of *Star Wars* merchandise? If you own any of it, particularly in mint condition, your fortune is made. It's worth noting too that, during the summer of 1977 in which *Star Wars* first entered our pop-culture milieu, the Disney company rereleased their feature-film version of the *Crockett* shows. Many middle-aged people brought their own kids, now the age they'd been when first they witnessed actor Fess Parker in buckskins, going down fighting at the Alamo, in order to relive themselves that glorious adventure while sharing it with their kids. Adults loved it all over again but, more than twenty years later, the film left a new generation cold. Why are we watching this? What's it all about? *I don't get it. . . .*

That did not happen when parents who had first fallen in love with *Star Wars* back in the late 1970s and early 1980s brought their own children to see revised versions of the first three films, newly enhanced with state-of-the-art special effects, on their re-release. Or to the prequel trilogy when it (finally!) appeared, equaling and in some cases even outdistancing the commercial if not necessarily critical impact of the three initial movies. In time, going to see *Star Wars* with one's kids became a ritual. And, like all rituals since the beginning of time, it conveyed religious aspects of cult worship, whether the partakers grasped this or not, or whether Lucas and his gifted crew had dreamed of any such long-lasting impact, which is doubtful.

Star Wars, simply put, had turned out to be not merely the latest momentary blip on the entertainment screen but an essential element of how we define ourselves through the movies and related media. It might be argued that not only was *Star Wars* absorbed into the mainstream of American (and international) thinking but that it has come to define that enormous area in a way no other phenomenon (*Star Trek* does come close) ever managed to do. That, in and of itself, and in addition to the artistic elements in the work, qualifies Lucas's saga as worthy of close study and ongoing scrutiny.

But what, specifically, *to* study? The answer to that is simple: Everything! Lucas's initial intention may have been humble: to entertain people in a way that most then-recent films failed to do, reviving the glory days of old Hollywood Popcorn Films if with a modernist edge of sly humor. For all we know, that may well have been all Shakespeare hoped for from his plays,

believing as he apparently did that the sonnets were the place to wax serious. Four hundred years later, those plays continue to provide remarkable live theater and are scrutinized from not only literary or dramatic but every imaginable angle: what the work has to say about life then and now, about spirituality and society, philosophy and politics, good and evil, and, most important, that cliché of clichés, the human condition itself.

Lofty stuff! Chances are if anyone back in Elizabethan England dared suggest that the Bard's entertaining plays added up to a profound and prophetic worldview he would have been laughed or shouted down, perhaps both. This was raw, robust diversion, shows that appealed more to the ignorant groundlings than the university wits, who much preferred, say, Christopher Marlowe. Even as college-educated people of the mid-to-late 1970s more likely were attracted to films by Martin Scorsese or Francis Ford Coppola than those of Lucas or Steven Spielberg, including those that the two "popcorn" filmmakers collaborated on, the "Indiana Jones" features. Still, the works of Shakespeare, if written off as little more than well-crafted time-killers four centuries ago, pass the test of time, that shaking-out process in which what momentarily appears to be important more often than not falls by the wayside in a natural selection. As the popular play and Oscar-winning movie *Amadeus* (1984) effectively illustrates, instantaneous classics are more often than not forgotten only a few years later, while classical culture (think of opera) turns out to be popular culture plus time. Indeed, the acclaimed *Amadeus* itself is rarely mentioned anymore, though the public remains fixated on a film that appeared one year earlier and did not receive an Oscar nomination for Best Picture, much less the award itself: *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*.

Whether people will (if people still exist) be watching *Star Wars* four hundred years from now remains to be seen. We do know they watch it still and that the saga's appeal does not appear to be in any danger of abating. So like the work of Shakespeare, the serious study of which had to begin at some point in time, we likewise need to consider *Star Wars* from every conceivable angle. The chapters that Leah Deyneka and I have collected for this anthology ripple out from such a premise. We have attempted to bring together the best original thought and writing about *Star Wars* via diverse essays by scholars young and old—some highly experienced in the craft of analysis set alongside other, new voices.

Our central hope was to employ *Star Wars* as a jumping-off spot for intellectual discussion. What makes it tick? The answer to that is akin to the old adage that has a group of blindfolded people, none of whom have any knowledge at all about an elephant, attempting to describe that creature after now coming in contact with one. The person who touches the trunk will tell you an elephant resembles a long hose; at the other end, the one who feels the tail will insist an elephant is something like a string or snake. The person who grasps a leg will assure a listener, similarly unfamiliar with the beast, that an elephant is much like a column in the Roman coliseum.

The point is less that each is wrong than that all are partially correct. Put the interpretations together, roll them into a single package and, in tandem, they will go far in offering a full grasp of the creature.

One question that will invariably be raised as to these interpretations is yes, but do you think that George Lucas really *intended* that? The best answer we can offer comes from the other great Popcorn Film creator of the last half-century, Steven Spielberg, collaborator with Lucas on the much-loved "Indiana Jones" movies. Shortly after the release of his *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), Spielberg was informed that a pastor told his congregation *E.T.* ought to be accepted as an allegory for the life of Christ: the gentle, god-like yet vulnerable E.T. descends from on high, performs good deeds, develops a following of disciples, and finally dies only to rise again. This is heady stuff when we recall that E.T. was originally conceived as a contemporary version of those Disney films Spielberg, like Lucas, had grown up loving. All the same, when asked for a reaction, he said:

> I've been too busy making movies to stop and analyze how or why I make 'em. Lucas was the most surprised kid on the block when *Star Wars* became a megahit. He had tapped a nerve that not only went deep but global. George has theories now, about five years later, but at the time there was no explaining. I think George realized the meaning of what he had done as much from the critiques he read, and the psychological analysis they pinned to *Star Wars*, as from his own introspection.[1]

Spielberg then admitted that he feels the same about *E.T.* and his own films. As a musty literary concept called The Intentional Fallacy argued, just because a filmmaker (or for that matter any artist working in any medium) isn't fully aware of what he or she is doing does not necessarily mean such elements aren't there. As Spielberg suggests, a critic in the best sense of that term can approximate for an artist the role of a psychiatrist with a patient, explaining to his subject the very things about himself he can't grasp without the intervention of another.

Likewise, we perceived *Star Wars* as a phenomenal prism. Our diverse contributors set out to project individual rays of light that then pass through it from different points of origin. We the editors believe each chapter will allow for some greater insight into *Star Wars.* Yet fine as any one may be, when read in succession, the sincere hope is that they will provide a whole that's more enlightening even than the sum of its intriguing parts.

NOTE

1. Steven Spielberg, *L.A. Weekly*, Summer 1982, quoted in Douglas Brode, *The Films of Steven Spielberg* (New York: Citadel Press/Carol Publishing, 1995).

1

A Rocky Road to *Star Wars*

The Early Life and Career of George Lucas

Douglas Brode

Before *Star Wars*, there was *THX 1138* (1971). And before that *Electronic Labyrinth: THX 1138 4EB* (1967–1968), an indie film prepared by George Lucas and a group of his students in 1967. Having graduated from the University of Southern California, the man who would in six years initiate "the saga" returned to his alma mater as a part-time professor. But anyone who approaches *THX 1138* with expectations of discovering some prelude to *A New Hope* in the same manner that *The Hobbit* (1937) sets the tone and introduces the plots of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954–1955) will be in for a surprise. Though *THX 1138* and *Star Wars* can and often are referred to as science fiction (incorrectly in both cases, at least according to Lucas) they share so little in common as to artistic intent and audience impact that it's difficult to believe the two movies hail from the same filmmaker. Yet that dichotomy, initially confounding, is basic to any full and true understanding of George Lucas, his work, and how and why he created *Star Wars* when he did.

A dichotomy, particularly in terms of motion pictures, appeared while Lucas was still a teenager. Born in Modesto, a medium-sized Central Valley California town on May 14, 1944, his main interest then was racing cars. Lucas hoped to become a professional until an accident on June 12, 1962 (in fictionalized form re-created in 1973's *American Graffiti*) ruled that out. Shortly he was studying liberal arts at Modesto Junior College. Already Lucas, like so many young people, had become a dedicated movie buff. Early on at least, this meant heading for the local bijou to catch every new Hollywood release: Westerns, most notably John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956); films that addressed the new youth of the mid-1950s like Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause* (1955); mature projects from long-standing masters,

Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) most memorable. Also, science fiction, from the Big Bug movies drawing on fear of atomic energy (*Them!*, 1954) to mini-epics about visitors from the stars (*Invaders from Mars*, 1953) and travel to outer space (*Destination Moon*, 1950). Also, action epics (*The Bridge on the River Kwai*, 1957) about World War II, with its Crusader mentality that allowed Americans to unquestionably believe they were fighting for the right. Such a viewpoint, as well as precise images such as a bombing raid from *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo* (1944) would reappear, if in fantasy form, in the first *Star Wars* film.

As far as Lucas knew then, these were the only movies in existence. He adored such stuff, even as his varied contemporaries did. They included, though Lucas could not know it at the time, a young man of about the same age, Steven Spielberg, growing up first in New Jersey, then Arizona. Though the paths of Lucas and Spielberg would not cross for some time, the young George did find himself, while still in high school, under the influence of another immigrant from a red state, Bruce Baillie of South Dakota. Recently relocated in northern California, Baillie—Lucas's senior by twelve years—had become intrigued by experimental cinema. Even as Lucas finished high school as a mediocre-at-best student, Baillie was in the process of shooting *On Sundays* (1960–1961), which would attract attention to his *avant-garde* work. In San Francisco, Baillie helped form Canyon Cinema, which screened the works of non-Hollywood *auteurs*, marked by an anti-narrative approach and surreal stylistics. Stan Brakhage, who would influence the films of Yoko Ono and John Lennon, was included. These were shown to a *cognoscenti* clientele in small, dingy theaters and late-Beat-era coffeehouses. When Lucas heard about such stuff, he began to trek to Frisco, also visiting such haunts as the City Lights Bookstore, a high temple of alternative culture.

Lucas, in the presence of edgy intellectuality and offbeat creativity for the first time, flashed on like the proverbial light bulb. He'd soon be inspired by the work of Canada's Arthur Lipsett, confiding to friends: "That's the kind of movie I want to make," referring to "a very off-the-wall, abstract kind of film."[1] This is far from *Star Wars* with its well-crafted conventional storytelling. Here, then, was that dichotomy in embryo: Lucas's earlier love of films designed primarily as entertainment balanced with a fascination with others self-consciously intended as art.

Lucas enrolled in Modesto Junior College and took liberal arts classes while developing a keen interest in the possibilities of photography. If he could not become a race-car driver then he might document sleek vehicles as they tore around an autocross track. While doing so one day he met Haskell Wexler, a cinematographer (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, 1966; *In the Heat of the Night*, 1967) who shared his fascination with cars. Wexler was impressed and became Lucas's first mentor, also suggesting that the

youth transfer to USC, the West Coast hub of film study. Significant is that the technical side of film, more than the dramatic elements, were what drew Lucas to production. He entered USC hoping to become a photographer or cinematographer. Lucas believed that if he had any artistic talent it was likely of a visual, not verbal, orientation. He would later recall:

> I had no intention of becoming a writer. I was always horrible at English. . . . I don't think I'm a good writer now. I think I'm a terrible writer. . . . I can barely spell my own name, let alone form a sentence.[2]

Creating "tone poems" on celluloid allowed him to ignore trite narrative structure, forsaking all literary aspects of movies, instead concentrating on the cinema's less obvious if perhaps more profound relationship to the graphic arts.[3] As chance or destiny would have it, one of the first classes Lucas was required to take, animation, dealt with what might be thought of as representing the opposite direction of the realism he appeared headed for. Perhaps to his own surprise, Lucas proved gifted as such work, which allowed him to avoid traditional storytelling not by filming in the real world but creating an alternative one. He shot a one-minute piece called *Look at Life* (1964) that won numerous awards. Here, clearly, was a talent to be reckoned with. Eight more films followed in rapid succession. After graduation, the aspiring filmmaker, like other liberal-minded young men of the mid-1960s, had a higher priority than finding a job: avoiding the draft. Diabetes allowed Lucas his "out." Hoping to pursue his new interest, he applied for a job at Hanna-Barbera but did not receive the position.

With a second dichotomy now established, Lucas swung back to capturing the real world with a camera. He did find work as a cinematographer on two "rockumentaries," the famed one about the Woodstock music festival in upstate New York in 1969, then the infamous bad-vibes Rolling Stones concert in Altamont, California. Yet this interest remained tempered by a growing desire to become further involved with a more stylized sort of film. In time, the two would merge, first in *THX 1138*, then, if less obviously so, in *Star Wars*. At the time Lucas returned to USC to pursue a graduate degree, moving away, like the pendulum on a clock, from (or so it briefly seemed) realism to fantasy. The premise for the original *THX* called for a "serious" science-fiction fable in the tradition of George Orwell's *1984* (1948) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931). This meant preparing a script, a process he still hated. "When I sit down I bleed on the page," he has said, "and it's just awful."[4] All the same, he suffered through the process.

Lucas set his tale in a near future in which people have been reduced to cogs in a world transformed into a vast technological apparatus, ruled over by a Big Brother who watches all, insisting on conformity. Clearly the concept was borrowed and, if once revolutionary, now long since

hackneyed. Yet Lucas, being Lucas, came up with a fresh way to distinguish the piece, deciding to shoot entirely on existing locations in Los Angeles. Before filming commenced, Lucas carefully picked buildings that struck him as vaguely futuristic. Once the cameras rolled, he created a "new" landscape, not by building one in some studio, but through careful selection of existing architectural objects. In other words, he created fantasy out of reality.

Thematically, this allowed Lucas to suggest that, like those places in which his film unfolds—recognizable to any who knew that city, on another level reconfigured owing to choices—the nightmarish possibilities for such a tomorrow already existed in embryonic form here and now, if anyone would only open his eyes and notice. The result would be a cautionary fable of a dystopian nature, announcing (without reliance on words, Lucas's images fully expressive of his ideas) that we were already well on our way to becoming what we most feared. Lucas's job—the role of the artist, as he now saw it, not some popular entertainer—was to shake a viewer into a conscious awareness of our endangered state. As in *Look at Life* a few years earlier, Lucas's latest became a hit at festivals, furthering his reputation.

Later in 1967 Lucas wandered onto the set where Francis Ford Coppola was shooting his big studio musical *Finian's Rainbow*, a colossal undertaking and, on release, a box-office flop. Lucas's passion for the medium immediately attracted Coppola as it earlier had Wexler. Coppola had already navigated a route Lucas hoped to follow, from USC super-talent student to, now, legitimate Hollywood director. He was part of a group of young people more or less taking over even as the old masters shot their final films: John Ford (*7 Women*, 1966), Howard Hawks (*Rio Lobo*, 1970), and such. Shortly Lucas moved from student-observer to personal assistant. While making a documentary about Coppola called *Filmmaker* (1969) as that director worked on a small indie project, *The Rain People* (1969), Lucas mentally expanded his recent work into a feature. The hope was to launch himself as one of the "movie brats" (Spielberg and Martin Scorsese among them), then navigating into an obviously devastated industry. Dennis Hopper's recent philosophical biker-flick *Easy Rider* (1969) scored even as the latest Julie Andrews musical, *Star!* (1968) failed to recoup expenses. Precisely the same thing happened with *Finian's Rainbow*, which explains why Coppola stepped away from such spectacular entertainment to do a self-consciously "little" film.

Simply put, America had seemingly been numbed to such old-fashioned entertainments by an ever-more-radical-violent civil rights movement, the ongoing and apparently endless war in Southeast Asia, and political assassinations that rocked the foundations of our nation. What has been called the Hippie Era, a supposed revolution that largely turned out to be a tem-

porary aberration, resulted. Meanwhile, a new period had to have not only its own music—the protest/ folk/ hard/ psychedelic rock—but new movies as well. Lucas was only too happy to provide one. Though his new mentor was glad to support this younger variation on himself, Coppola did try to encourage the budding director to write. "I can't write a screenplay," Lucas wailed, wanting to farm that out to others and concentrate on visuals.[5] Coppola insisted: "He told me, 'you have to learn to write, to structure.'[6] So it's because of him that I got into it. He forced me." If Coppola had not, Lucas likely could never have moved on to create *American Graffiti*, much less the *Star Wars* films.

Lucas tried it alone, hating every second. Then, after failing with several collaborators, he did complete a script with another USC grad, Walter Murch. Then thanks to Coppola, Warner Bros. agreed to green-light *THX 1138*. Lucas and Haskell Wexler did much of the cinematography. As head honcho, Lucas made the decision to employ not the stylized lighting effects often associated with science fiction and space fantasy but available light. Asked to describe the film's unique look, Lucas stated, "Everyone else calls it science fiction. I call it documentary fantasy."[7] However off-hand, his comment reveals two significant aspects of Lucas the filmmaker: first, he did not then and in truth never would associate himself with the genre he's most often associated; second, the dichotomy, a presence of opposites in his work. In another context, Lucas intriguingly referred to *THX 1138* as a "documentary film of the future," again suggesting a combining of elements that appear oppositional.[8] In time, that approach would dictate the opening of what at first glance seems a futuristic tale: "*A long time ago*, in a galaxy far, far away" (emphasis mine)—the past as future.

In due time, *A New Hope* would immediately involve us emotionally with one appealing character after another: R2-D2 and C-3PO, Princess Leia, Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Han Solo. Nothing of the sort occurs in *THX 1138*. The leads, THX (Robert Duvall) and LUH (Maggie McOmie), are as robotic as any mechanical creatures moving about in the background. We are asked to accept each as a chess piece on a complicated board, Lucas's ambition to intellectually stimulate us as, from a distance, we observe their comings and goings, coldly chronicled by Lucas's camera-eye. Striking visuals in this antiseptically white, boxed-in world do not excite our senses but turn them off so we are, while watching, at one with those trapped in a deadening world. The Lucas we meet here, then, shocking for those who discover *THX 1138* only after *Star Wars*, does not appear to shape up as a Tweedle-Dee to Spielberg's Tweedle-Dum. If we were to calculate his likely course, we might predict Lucas would emerge as some cinematic second cousin to such out-of-the-mainstream types as David Lynch (*Eraserhead*, 1977), David Cronenberg (*Videodrome*, 1983), or Darren Aronofsky (*Pi*, 1998).

In retrospect, Bernard Beck would analyze the logic behind *THX 1138*'s critical success (if more with academic reviewers than the mainstream press) and commercial failure:

> Science fiction cannot be taken seriously without accepting it on its own terms—as entertainment . . . when the message precedes the expression . . . the result rarely swings as well as when involvement in the world of "sci-fi" generates a message.[9]

The later, preferred method advanced by Beck would far better describe *Star Wars* than *THX 1138*, granted (and this is an issue) that *SW* qualifies as science fiction. Perhaps Lucas and Beck were both to a degree wrong. However Lucas perceives his own film, *THX 1138* has more in common with traditional science fiction as it has evolved from Jules Verne and H. G. Wells—essentially, writing a history of the future—than *Star Wars*, with its freewheeling mythological universe. Yet Beck appears to include *Star Wars* and its predecessors—*Flash Gordon*, *Buck Rogers*, et al.—in his definition of sci-fi though they are more correctly examples of the related genre of space fantasy. What's clear to the viewer, and intended by the artist, is that *THX 1138* is minimalist and passionless. Lucas's assumption was that a new audience had emerged out of the chaos of the late 1960s that cynically laughed at the old Hollywood clichés, far too sophisticated for such easy and obvious emotionalism, eager to observe something challenging on a cerebral level.

As to the convergence at this time of the fast-fading studios, which scaled down to become producers/financers/distributors of product, and the emergent indies with their original ideas, *THX 1138* would be released by Warner Bros., though produced under the auspices of Coppola's ill-fated American Zoetrope. This was a San Francisco–based commune-cum-filmmaking studio of young intellectual talents. With the sudden demise of the ancient Production Code for self-censorship, they were free to do pretty much anything they wanted, with only one stipulation: It had to make money. Had such films raked in big profits, Lucas, Coppola, and others could have continued to make oddball films for as long as they liked. There was only one catch: Most of the little indies, from Coppola's *The Rain People* to Lucas's *THX 1138*, died at the box office. Shot on small budgets, the losses were not cataclysmic. That did occur when self-indulgence set in. Hopper, who completed *Easy Rider* for less than $400,000, then watched as it grossed more than $30 million, next turned out *The Last Movie* (1971), which cost well over a million to make (then a considerable sum) yet grossed $35,000. Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) eventually won back its outrageous $30+ million cost owing to a remarkable re-creation of Vietnam. A far more personal project, *One from the Heart* (1982), set in Las

Vegas but shot on studio sets for an expressionistic mise-en-scène, cost $25 million but brought in only a few hundred thousand.

At that moment, American Zoetrope died, with it the dream of a New American Cinema focusing, despite a misnomer in the title of Coppola's *One from the Heart*, more on self-conscious aesthetics and cold intellect than raw emotion. A fear spread through Hollywood that if someone did not come up with an alternative to both the outdated formula films and unappealing (at least to the mass audience) art-house items, the movie business could go bust. A middle ground did emerge. *Patton* (1970), with a screenplay by Coppola, paved the way. This World War II epic decimated the Generation Gap by providing older viewers with what they accepted as a rah-rah flag-waver, younger ticket-buyers with "a tribute to a rebel." Next Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) offered not a return to hoary gangster films of yore but a reinvention of the genre. A towering work combining old-Hollywood craftsmanship and the newer radical sensibility, the "*Gone with the Wind* of gangster films" deeply involved audiences in the story of a loving family that, by the way, happened to run organized crime.[10] Anti-establishment ideas, which couldn't previously be presented in mainstream movies, were expressed. Three years later, Spielberg did something similar with *Jaws*, proving that a monster movie might also reveal the dark underside of a seemingly wholesome small town.

In between came *American Graffiti* (1973), Lucas's second film and first huge hit. This long-night's-journey-into-day ensemble piece about recent high school grads might appear to have little in common with *The Godfather* or *Jaws*. It does relate as to the creation of a New-Old Cinema: films that locate serious themes in the context of crowd-pleasing entertainment. Lucas shifted (that dichotomy again) from an Artist making a Big Statement to someone who appeared only to entertain. For some, this implied "selling out":

> If they want warm human comedy, I'll give them one, just to show that I can do it. *THX 1138* is very much the way I am as a film-maker. *American Graffiti* is very much the way I am as a person—two different worlds really.[11]

A Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde statement if ever there was one. As to capitulation to crass commercialism, while that charge is valid it can also be challenged. Two of the filmmakers Lucas studied while in film school were Ford and Orson Welles. In 1941, each had unleashed what many believe his masterwork: Ford's *How Green Was My Valley*, Welles's *Citizen Kane*, the greatest conventional and unconventional film of that year. Ford's won the Best Picture Oscar and was among the top-grossing films. Welles was snubbed for that honor and his movie barely recouped its costs. Each, in its own right, qualifies as a work of genius. Thereafter, Welles encountered difficulty in getting projects into production; Ford could pretty much choose what

he wanted to do. The Welles approach denied emotionalism or entertainment value to directly confront his viewers with aesthetics and ideology; Ford emotionally drew an audience in, though no one could accuse him of making a film devoid of remarkable moviemaking and thought-provoking material.

Here, then, was the choice that Lucas and other young filmmakers now had to make. If Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* was the *Citizen Kane* of 1980, Lucas's *The Empire Strikes Back* was its *How Green Was My Valley*. Both were great movies; one made a great deal of money. The other didn't. In films as in politics, there exists elitism and populism. Scorsese became the Welles of the late twentieth century whereas Lucas tied with Spielberg as its Ford. Like Ford, Lucas did not abandon the concept of thematic work to provide empty escapism. The auteur theory holds that personal expression ranks high among the hallmarks of moviemaking if only because it's so difficult to achieve in a medium at once collaborative and commercial by nature. Lucas did create a through-line that ties *THX*, *AG*, and *SW* together as a body of work that projects a single consciousness: like Lucas, the hero of each is a young man (Robert Duvall, Richard Dreyfuss, Mark Hamill) who cannot fit in with the world in which he finds himself trapped. Before each film ends, that protagonist makes his escape, heading off to some place that will hopefully allow him to discover his identity. Critic Ryan Gilbey would refer to this as "the George Lucas story": the life of his fictional alter egos as well as the factual person.[12]

So: If everything old was new again, why not draw on memories from childhood? Lucas could revive the films he most loved as a little boy, now perhaps too dated for an altered American audience, freshening them up so they would work again in a new manner. In retrospect, "Lucas's skill lay in recognizing that only the cosmetic appearance of adventure cinema was in need of alteration; its heart and soul could be transferred intact."[13] On a whim, perhaps, Lucas had chosen to begin *THX* with a clip from the beloved cliffhanger *Buck Rogers* (1939), Buster Crabbe playing a heroic intergalactic traveler. Back in 1971, Lucas had intended a snippet from that hoary antique to serve as a contrast to his very different, serious-minded exercise in sci-fi. The film that followed rejected rather than emulated its prologue. Yet at some screenings, audiences cheered the black-and-white film clip for which they were supposed to harbor only contempt, then at the end jeered at what they perceived as a pretentious bore. Perhaps Lucas had been wrong?

People—real people in the everyday world—want to be entertained. They will sit still for substance only if a filmmaker first entertains them. Then, as Peter Lev noted, "The science fiction film, as a construction removed from everyday reality, is a privileged vehicle for the presentation of ideology."[14] Call the genre science fiction, space opera, or imaginative fantasy; it al-

lows for the creation of a fun film that "discusses the problems of today in fantastic settings," politics and religion featured "in an allegorical fashion, which is less likely to offend people's sensibilities."[15] Lucas had been mistaken, he realized, in believing a cynical point of view toward such stuff had emerged as the order of the day. His approach must be to laugh with, not at, clichés from old films, adoring them for sentimental value while offering a sophisticated wink at what was now a knowing audience. How about, then, remaking in such a manner *Buck Rogers*, or its companion piece, the even more elaborate *Flash Gordon* (1936), which also featured Crabbe? Lucas checked on the rights and found them too expensive. Others would have given up. Not George.

Why not unofficially blend them together and give the characters new names? Create something more than a clever remake of a delightful nostalgia-piece by devising his own film, offering the best of both along with every other genre piece he could think of: *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*; *Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers*; *Catwomen of the Moon*—only with an edge, and an undercurrent of intellectual substance. The result would be an apotheosis; the entire genre rolled up into a new work that not only played as a genre piece for the mass audience but contained references, or homages, only fellow film buffs would get—essentially, a cult film that would succeed with huge crowds, doing for space fantasy what in 1968 Sergio Leone's *Once upon a Time in the West* had for the old-fashioned oater.

Goodbye, then, to that long-standing dichotomy; hello to its replacement, a satisfying duality. The result, of course, would be *Stars Wars*. And nothing would be quite the same again, for George Lucas or any of us. . . .

NOTES

1. Quoted in Michael Kaminski, *Adventures in Filmmaking: The Secret History of Star Wars* (Kingston, Ontario: Legacy Books Press, 2008), 21.
2. Kaminski, *Adventures in Filmmaking*, 22.
3. Kaminski, *Adventures in Filmmaking*, 23.
4. Ryan Gilbey, *It Don't Worry Me: The Revolutionary American Films of the Seventies* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2003), 59.
5. Kaminski, *Adventures in Filmmaking*, 27.
6. Kaminski, *Adventures in Filmmaking*, 26.
7. Gilbey, *It Don't Worry Me*, 48.
8. Kaminski, *Adventures in Filmmaking*, 31.
9. Bernard Beck, "The Overdeveloped Society: *THX 1138*," in *Hal in the Classroom*, ed. Ralph J. Amelio (Dayton, OH: Pflaum, 1974), 72–81. Also in *Trans-Action*, September 1971.
10. Paul D. Zimmerman, "Godfathers and Sons," *Newsweek*, December 23, 1974, 78.

11. Quoted by Stephen Farber, "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits the Big Time," *Film/Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 5.

12. Gilbey, *It Don't Worry Me*, 57.

13. Gilbey, *It Don't Worry Me*, 63.

14. Peter Lev, *American Films of the 70s: Conflicting Visions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 165.

15. John S. Schultes, "Any Gods Out There? Perceptions of Religion from *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*," *Journal of Religion and Film* 7, no. 2 (October 2003).

2

Star Wars in Black and White

Race and Racism in a Galaxy Not So Far Away

Andrew Howe

Despite being set in a distant galaxy, the *Star Wars* franchise has never been able to escape the gravitational pull of contemporary racial politics. Whether or not deserved, voices both popular and elite have questioned George Lucas regarding the intrusion of race into his narrative. These questions have dogged him since the release of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* in May 1977, throughout both the original and subsequent prequel trilogies, and continue to be a factor in contemporary reception. Accusations of cinematic racism have been numerous along both sides of the representational fault line. On the one hand, troubling depictions rooted in racial stereotypes have been noted; conversely, omissions that constitute an equally troubling lack of positive representation have also been identified. Since 1977, isolated essays and even book-length works have explored the cultural dimensions of *Star Wars*. The Glenn Kenny–edited collection *A Galaxy Not so Far Away* (2002) is notable in the canon of *Star Wars* criticism, as is the Carl Silvio and Tony M. Vinci–edited collection *Culture, Identities and Technology in the Star Wars Films* (2007).[1] Some critics, such as Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., have concluded that the racism in these films is both manifest and prevalent; others, such as Christopher Deis, have suggested that such accusations are often overstated. What most of these works share in common is a lack of distance from the second trilogy. Indeed, Wetmore's book *The Empire Triumphant* (2005) only touches briefly on *Revenge of the Sith*; Kenny's collection only examines four of the films. Now that a few years have passed since the final installment, it is time to return critically to both trilogies. Exploring portrayal and its partner, perception, this chapter will examine this issue through its historical, critical, and popular channels, the latter for which the fertile landscape of the Internet has served as a cultural

echo chamber. Some accusations of racism enjoy a solid grounding in evidence; others have little merit and exist only in the minds of isolated viewers. I examine only the cinematic galaxy; the series of books and other cultural artifacts that have served to add a multicultural dimension to the narrative will not be entertained, as they are best viewed as marginal vis-à-vis Lucas's core vision.

In the original trilogy, there is a notable absence of human racial minorities. With few exceptions, Lucas populates his galaxy with Caucasians. Apparently, there is only room for a lily-white gentry in the form of the Empire and a Rebel Alliance that, despite a few multicultural elements, is also largely white. Minority characters such as Lando Calrissian do play important roles, but even these depictions are somewhat problematic. Indeed, the bulk of minorities in this trilogy derive from aliens and droids, suggesting a post-human world whereby racial difference has ceased to become a marker of identity when there are other species against whom identity barriers can be formed.[2] Post-colonial theorist Stuart Hall notes the oppositional nature of identity formation:

> Identity is always . . . a structured representation that achieves its positive only through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself. It produces a very Manichaean set of opposites.[3]

In the opening textual scrawl, Lucas signals to his audience that this galaxy does not represent our own. However, we can never fully separate cultural products from their context. For instance, it is only natural to assume that audiences not yet ten years removed from major race riots across the United States and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. would have discovered racial codes hidden throughout this narrative, regardless of any intentionality on the part of Lucas. The response to *Star Wars* has indicated that, despite the success of the series, cultural anxieties regarding aspects of metaphoric portrayal can be powerful indeed. Such societal response exists on a continuum from collectively determined racist depictions to ones that only a few identify.

On one extreme, Lucas's representation of the Tusken Raiders (Sand People) is quite troubling. In their clothing, habits, and lifestyle, this species serves as a distinct analogue to the Bedouin and other such desert-dwelling, nomadic cultures.[4] The Tuskens are, in equal parts, portrayed as brutish, cowardly, and murderous, definitely capable, but born out of clever instinct rather than intellect. In *A New Hope*, they attack Luke and would probably kill him save for Ben Kenobi's intervention. In *The Phantom Menace*, they entertain themselves by shooting at and presumably killing several of the pod racers. And finally, they demonstrate utter savagery in kidnapping

Shmi in *Attack of the Clones*. Although it is not established in the narrative, presumably she has been sexually assaulted during her month-long captivity. The image of her in the tent, bound and beaten, hearkens back to a cinematic legacy of white women similarly abused by indigenous Americans in *The Searchers* and other Westerns. This grisly episode provides a narrative point of transition in Anakin's turn toward the Dark Side, as in reaction to Shmi's death he slaughters the entirety of a Tusken village, including women and children. As Cliegg Lars states: "Those Tuskens walk like men, but they're vicious, mindless monsters."[5] It is interesting to note that Lars says "walk" and not "talk." Although portraying them as bipedal, Lucas withholds from the Tuskens any sort of humanizing speech, employing for their communication guttural grunting and the braying of donkeys. There is no reason to suppose that desert-dwelling humanoids would evolve any differently on Tatooine than on Earth. However, in withholding any positive aspects of Tusken culture, Lucas sets them up as straw man villains for several generations of protagonists. Considering that there is an easily identifiable real-world analogue to this species, the portrayal of the Tuskens is legitimately disturbing when considering the place of race in *Star Wars*.

Conversely, it is quite a stretch to view the Jawas or Chewbacca as symbolic of Mexican culture, as has been claimed.[6] Reasons cited for the latter, that the Jawas are short and tinker with speeders and other pieces of machinery, suggest more about viewer or critic than George Lucas. Such claims concerning Chewbacca, revolving around his nickname ("Chewie") and the fact that he serves as mechanic on the *Millennium Falcon*, are even more ludicrous.[7] Somewhere between the accurate identification of Tusken Raiders as problematic and the chaotic and baseless claims regarding Chewbacca and the Jawas are the Ewoks, who in their guerilla warfare in *Return of the Jedi* and temporal proximity to the 1970s have been linked to the Vietnam War by Tom Carson and others.[8] Carson denotes the Ewoks themselves as a "cinematic tribute [to] the Viet Cong."[9] An intriguing suggestion by Wetmore, usually a bit quick to cry racism in examining Lucas's aliens, has Jabba the Hutt representing a sultan with a largely disrobed Leia serving as a member of his harem. He notes that "Jabba is presented from the very beginning as a lusty, decadent sultan-like creature. He reclines on a throne, eats decadent food, and is surrounded by guards and sycophants."[10] Although these same attributes could also pertain to the courts of classical and medieval European rulers, the desert location and decidedly Eastern decor do suggest a Turkish or Arabic potentate.

Given the perception of aliens as racialized others, Lucas may be attempting a multicultural statement about race and power in his portrayal of the edges of empire, particularly in the Mos Eisley bar sequence. In comparison with just about every other location in the original trilogy, the bar features a large number of aliens. This depiction is in stark contrast to the all-human,

all white committee meetings where Grand Moff Tarkin and the Death Star brass set the imperial agenda. Perhaps Lucas is suggesting that it is only in areas of lax governmental control that racial minorities can exist unmodified by race-based expectations. This notion is similar to one cultivated in *The Matrix* trilogy, where the residents of the free city Zion and its ruling council largely seem to be minorities, Caucasian Christ-figure Neo notwithstanding. Lucas, however, uses aliens as his benchmark for difference, leaving little room for human minorities. Regardless of his motives, having the human characters almost exclusively white is disquieting. As will be examined later, Lucas apparently took such criticism seriously, as in the prequel trilogy the numbers and importance of characters of color were much more pronounced.

The major criticism levied against the original trilogy, however, was less about absence than presence. The brunt of the criticism invests largely in two characters and the manners in which each represented blackness: Lando Calrissian and Darth Vader. Lando's appearance in *The Empire Strikes Back* as Cloud City administrator and former friend to Han Solo was perhaps a concession on the part of Lucas to accusations of racism following his initial film. This character would play integral roles in this film and *Return of the Jedi*, proving indispensable to the resistance effort in the latter by destroying the second Death Star, in essence replacing the white Luke Skywalker as the representative of humanity in the assertion of the biological over the technological. However, critics and viewers alike have long noted his manner when first meeting Princess Leia as playing to certain race-based stereotypes.[11] When Lando first meets Leia, the licentious look on his face and his flirtatious overture ("Hello! What have we here?") easily represents the most uncomfortable intersection of race and sexuality in the entirety of Lucas's cinematic canon.[12] Portraying Lando with a hyper-sexualized libido places the narrative within a long, sordid history in American fiction of the male racial other imbued with tremendous sexual abilities. Far from being a positive representation, portraying the racial other as being hyper-sexual only serves to construct that character as a threat to the white heroine, in this case introducing yet another potential suitor to Princess Leia in an already crowded parlor.

Although there is much to criticize in Lando's entry into the narrative, the character never again displays this facet of his personality, and further criticisms do not hold up under the same level of scrutiny. Lando has often been glossed as a sort of inter-galactic pimp, as much for his grooming as for his initial reaction to Leia. Billy Dee Williams had straightened hair and a moustache, and wore a flowing cape in some of his scenes. Indeed, there is a strong subtext in online fandom regarding Lando's status as a pimp. "Lando Calrissian: Pimp of the Galaxy" is just one of several Facebook pages dedicated to this aspect of his personality.[13] A random online sam-

pling of unauthorized Lando biography has him hosting a Super Carbonite Rave Party at the Cloud City Disco[14] and partaking in the Twitter universe, with @Lando_Cal dispensing weekly advice regarding women and partying, with characteristic tweets such as the following: "Hot tub party @ Landos this weekend, fellas it's a 2 lady minimum for entry, Colt 45 on tap & Chewy is making Bantha Ribs."[15] More than any character with the possible exception of Boba Fett, an online cult surrounds the character of Lando, much of it highly focused upon his specific brand of masculinity rather than his prowess as a pilot or loyalty as a friend. Ultimately, however, there is little in the narrative to suggest him as a pimp. Far from contributing to this part of his identity, his grooming practices and clothing choices simply denote the period during which the film was made. Portrayals of blackness in the decade leading up to *The Empire Strikes Back* were often simplistic and reductive. Not exactly the positive representation one might expect after the successful acquisition of civil rights during the post–World War II period, black characters in Hollywood during the 1970s suffered from gross racial stereotyping, with black and white filmmakers alike relying upon stock character tendencies. Mario Van Peebles's 1971 *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* has been credited with popularizing the genre known as Blaxploitation. Criticized for its frank depictions of black violence and sexuality, this film received the X rating by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), leading Van Peebles to release it with the tagline "Rated X by an All White Jury." Although this film largely avoided black stereotypes, the cinematic gold rush that resulted from its success did not. Films such as *Car Wash* and *Foxy Brown*, many of them helmed by black directors, employed aspects of blackness geared to attract a larger audience. The representation of Lando as hyper-groomed and hyper-sexualized fit into this legacy of blaxploitation.[16]

Finally, the criminalization of Lando does not appear to contain any aspect of racism, even during a decade when more and more young black males were entering the prison system. In addition to mirroring Han Solo as a charismatic scoundrel, Lando is also criminalized in that he shares a prior smuggling association with Han and Chewbacca in a nebulous past that is never fully explained. However, he is no longer in the smuggling game; he has straightened out and is now accountable for the jobs and even lives of those living in Cloud City, a responsibility that eventually leads him to go against his nature and make a deal with the Empire. Betraying friends both old and new is clearly not easy for him and, although on the surface he seems to bow to David Hume's notion of utilitarianism in taking a knee before the Empire, he eventually helps Leia and Chewbacca escape with the droids, in so doing losing the Cloud City. Furthermore, Lando is the first to journey after Boba Fett in an attempt to free Han from his carbonite prison. Indeed, at the beginning of *Return of the Jedi*, there is no way of knowing

how long Lando has been undercover at Jabba's palace, risking his life for his friend. Thus, he is redeemed completely as a character, and his prior associations with criminal activity do not appear to have any racial codings whatsoever, even at the end of a decade marked by the Attica Prison Riots, the ascendancy of the Crips and the Bloods street gangs, and other high-profile aspects of black criminality. This criticism and others levied against George Lucas regarding the depiction of Lando Calrissian are spurious.

Darth Vader is the other character in the original trilogy noted for his blackness. Indeed, Vader's character perhaps represents the single biggest nexus of competing racial politics in Lucas's galaxy, representing a multi-layered pastiche of intriguing identities and anxieties. At first blush, Vader's blackness appears to be primarily visual and largely associated with his costume.[17] He is constructed as black in *all* of his clothing, with mask, body armor, boots, and cloak a shiny, reflective blackness. George Lucas has long been noted for his archly mythic sensibilities, which have included his use of colors to denote good and evil with clothing, lightsabers, and other artifacts.[18] Vader's utter blackness performs his evil, but it also reveals his potency and dominion over a galaxy that is largely white. In creating him so large, dark, and formidable, Lucas configures Vader as the antithesis to Luke Skywalker's depiction as a white-bread farm-boy. As Clyde Taylor argues, the name Luke Skywalker is symbolic in that it combines a biblical given name with an Anglo-Saxon surname.[19] Visually, the dichotomy between black and white is established in just about every scene in which Vader appears early on in *A New Hope*. From his intrusion into the gleaming white corridor of the rebel ship to his utter contrast with Princess Leia and her white tunic and pale skin, Vader's evil is clearly linked to his sartorial presence. And as Daniel Bernardi notes in his study on whiteness, it is the black element that is being highlighted for the viewer: "Hollywood attempts to segregate whiteness from color in ways that make the former invisible and the latter isolated and stereotypical."[20] It is interesting to note, however, that this black/white contrast diminishes over the course of the trilogy. As we begin to learn of the self-interest overriding his allegiance to the Dark Side, culminating in his destruction of Emperor Palpatine, Vader is filmed against darker and darker backgrounds.[21] Furthermore, his blackness is undermined in *The Empire Strikes Back* when we see the back of his pasty white head as he puts on his mask, and later as it is revealed that he and Luke are in fact father and son. This tension between black outer visage and white interior identity is even more pronounced in *Return of the Jedi* with Vader's de-masking.

The film *Chasing Amy*, directed by Kevin Smith, lampoons the racial politics evident in this scene. A militant black comic book artist is giving a speech on the racist depictions of minorities in *Star Wars*. After denoting Luke Skywalker a "cracker farm boy" and referencing the gentrifying

elements of the Rebel Alliance, this character turns to an analysis of Darth Vader, whom he dubs "the blackest brother in the galaxy."

> *Jedi* is the most insulting installment because Vader's beautiful black visage is SULLIED when he pulls off his mask to reveal a feeble, crusty, old white man. They trying to tell us that deep inside we all wants to be white.[22]

This line of reasoning is perceptive, as the transition from Vader's blackness to Anakin's flawed but distinct whiteness signals the character's return from the Dark Side. Blackness is thus constructed as a mask of evil that can be both acquired and discarded. When put into a sociological framework, this character aspect resonates with theories regarding cultural masking as recorded in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. In this landmark 1952 study, Fanon discusses oppressed groups who take on the cultural mask of their oppressors, obscuring their own culture and history in the process of trying to acquire more agency.[23] Although Vader represents an inversion of the phrase (white skin, black mask), the theory is still applicable. In his desire for power, specifically concerning the mastery of death as revealed in *Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin Skywalker turns his back on his friends, family, and background. The fact that this turn and the subsequent return at the end of *Return of the Jedi* are coded as black and white stands at the crux of arguments regarding Vader and racism. However, we must note that the association of whiteness with purity and good, and blackness with taint or evil, cuts across religions and cultures. In marking Vader so visually, George Lucas was doing little more than partake in a symbolic form of cinematic narrative extending back through the black and white cowboy hats of *Shane* and other Westerns to the very roots of Western expression.

Regardless of how accurate race-based criticisms might be regarding Lando Calrissian and Darth Vader, it is the perception of such things that is important. Clearly, George Lucas learned a thing or two from the criticism he received for the initial trilogy. Indeed, the sixteen-year gap between *Return of the Jedi* and *The Phantom Menace* allowed him to rethink the manner in which he populated Naboo, Coruscant, and the other planets featured in the prequel trilogy. This narrative arc is populated with more minority characters than its predecessor, from Samuel L. Jackson's portrayal of Mace Windu to the choice of multiple Polynesian actors to fill key roles, including those of Jango and Boba Fett. However, despite his efforts to be multicultural, *The Phantom Menace* was held up to even greater levels of ridicule for its racial politics. Unlike with past critiques, for *The Phantom Menace* there was little attention given to the absence of minorities; the focus here was on racial stereotypes. Most notably, controversy swirled around a single character, the Gungan sidekick Jar Jar Binks, who seemed to critics and moviegoers alike to be shallowly coded as Jamaican in his language and

culture. Furthermore, there were also other aliens in the narrative identified as racially problematic. Unlike in the first trilogy, where it was human characters who provided focal points for accusations of racism, in the prequel trilogy such characters were exclusively alien. In some cases, accusations of racial typing were overstated with such strange and exotic creatures serving to reflect cultural anxieties, particularly among viewers weaned on preconceptions regarding race in the initial trilogy.

Some of the criticism levied against Jar Jar Binks is legitimate, as actor Ahmed Best played the Gungan with an accent and cadence similar to Caribbean speech patterns. However, the similarities to this culture end there. The suggestion that Jar Jar's ears are representative of dreadlocks is strange, as they look very much like ears.[24] Jar Jar is an outcast who lacks direction, and the rest of his species are fairly regimented and warlike. Still, perception is what counts, and the sentiment was that Jar Jar was depicted in broad, stereotypical terms as the lazy Jamaican. Several months after the film's release, Lucas defended himself on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation): "Those criticisms are made by people who've obviously never met a Jamaican. . . . How in the world could you take an orange amphibian and say that he's a Jamaican?"[25] Unfortunately for Lucas, Jar Jar's voice was enough to cause widespread accusations of racism, particularly given that the film was released only a few years following a controversial decision by the Oakland School Board to employ vernacular African-American dialect, popularly dubbed "Ebonics," in classroom instruction. As J. Hoberman noted in his review of the film for the *Village Voice*, Jar Jar was "a rabbit-eared ambulatory lizard whose pidgin English degenerates from pseudo-Caribbean patois to Teletubby gurgle."[26]

Creating a space alien with a recognizable accent is a bit thin when denoting Lucas a racist, however. Certainly, some of the overreach with Jar Jar is attributable to how annoying audiences found the character, perhaps in part a reaction to the ascendancy of CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) as well as the perception that Lucas included him in the narrative largely to sell action figures. Even though there is no cinematic link between Jar Jar and drug use, this association is rampant on the blogosphere. References to Jar Jar abound on the Urban Dictionary website, where "Jar Jar Binks Faded" refers to getting so stoned that you begin to speak in Rastafarian gibberish.[27] A year after the film debuted in theaters, the online spoof *Jar Jar Binks: The F! True Hollywood Story* examined the character's alleged drug abuse.[28] This video went viral and is now available for purchase on Amazon or streaming on Netflix. Another video, a fan-edited version of the film called *The Phantom Edit*, also went viral. Edited by Mike Nichols, the largest difference between the original and this version was the exclusion of Jar Jar Binks. It is debatable the degree to which all of the anxiety over this character is warranted. Clearly, Ahmed Best did project an accent that could easily

be associated with a specific geographical region. However, it is reasonable for filmmakers to try to differentiate an alien species not only visually but aurally, as the alternative involves the critique of aliens who speak perfect English. Thus, having the actor play the role with an accent is understandable, and as there are numerous accents all over the world, it is difficult to find one devoid of connotation. Furthermore, we cannot in any regard lay the focus upon drugs at the feet of George Lucas; making the leap from Jamaican accent to drug use represents stereotyping by critics and viewers alike. The linguistic presence of Jar Jar Binks in the narrative represents a troubling distraction, but the degree to which this character entered the ongoing discussion of Hollywood racial depiction was disproportionate to what was actually on the screen.

Accusations of racism with other alien species in the prequel trilogy are even more tenuous. Indeed, it was almost as if the initial focus upon Jar Jar Binks and his problematic depiction led to open season in interpreting other characters along similar lines. Nute Gunray and the rest of the Neimoidian leadership from the Trade Federation were considered to have East Asian accents, perhaps indicating Lucas's acknowledgement of China's global ascendancy in regard to commerce. Kevin J. Wetmore Jr.'s book *Empire Triumphant* is one of few dedicated solely to race and the role it plays in *Star Wars*; surprisingly, three of his five chapters focus upon Asia and the Far East. His analysis when it comes to race and *Star Wars* leaves much to be desired. He denotes the Neimoidians as indicative of the Japanese during the World War II era, in large part because they are sadistic and powerful, although cowardly.[29] This assertion could be made about many totalitarian regimes. He also marks these aliens as Chinese, in particular as cultural inheritors of the legacy of Dr. Fu Manchu, although once again, the key features noted—in this case a plot to take over the world, an army of followers, and ingenious devices—could refer to a number of villains, including all of those populating the James Bond canon.[30] And finally, there is no hint of irony in noting how the Machiavellian qualities of cleverness and cunning in their business dealings also mark them as Chinese,when many other groups such as Italian statesmen, among them Niccolò Machiavelli himself, were known for being Machiavellian![31]

British actor Silas Carson, who is not East Asian, played Nute Gunray and several of the other Neimoidians. Furthermore, other Neimoidians clearly do *not* have East Asian accents. For instance, Tey How, who works a computer gathering information about the Jedi after their failed infiltration of the bridge, delivers a single line: "They've gone up the ventilation shaft." The accent here sounds Hispanic, suggesting that perhaps audiences have historically read too much into the Neimoidians. We can argue the same for Watto, the Toydarian junkyard dealer who owns Anakin Skywalker and his mother, Shmi. Some have seen his thick, guttural accent and unshaven

appearance as indicative of an Arabic stereotype; others have pointed to his business acumen and large, hooked nose as markers of Jewish identity.[32] However, not everyone who interpreted this character racially viewed him as Semitic, as a search of the Internet indicated a robust minority report for Watto as *Italian*, since he represents a type of underboss to the gangster Hutt family and has an Italian accent.[33] Can this character really be all of these things? The answer is clearly no. Watto is another example of a character reflecting the racial tensions of the general society. His nose seems less a cultural referent to Shylock or Fagan than to an elephant's trunk. He isn't clean-shaven because he is a junk dealer who lives on Tatooine, a desert planet, and Lucas has shown a tendency to use the five o'clock shadow to denote characters that are a bit rough around the edges. Also, Watto has a deep, guttural accent probably in order to match the visual with the auditory in his depiction as an elephant-like species. Watto demonstrates the richness of signs in Western culture, whereby the active mind will find whatever it seeks in the cultural referents presented. Unfortunately for Lucas, many of his viewers have found racial stereotypes coded within these signs.

Often ignored in the focus upon these three characters (Jar Jar Binks, Nute Gunray, and Watto) is the fact that Lucas populates his prequels with numerous positive portrayals of minorities. In *The Phantom Menace*, Ghanaian-born Hugh Quarshie plays Captain Panaka, the head of Queen Amidala's security force. Several Polynesian actors also play important roles. In *Attack of the Clones*, Maori actor Temuera Morrison plays Jango Fett, bounty hunter, source of DNA for the clone army, and father of fan favorite Boba Fett. He returns in *Revenge of the Sith* in nearly every scene in which a stormtrooper appears. The central planet of Coruscant is portrayed as quite cosmopolitan, from the Senate floor to the Jedi Temple to the bar where Anakin and Obi-Wan capture the assassin in *Attack of the Clones*. In the Senate, Chicano actor Jimmy Smits plays the distinguished Bail Organa, and in the Jedi Temple Mace Windu is second only to Yoda. Despite having an important role throughout the prequel trilogy, Mace Windu seems to be somewhat of a token character. However, this is less about his race than the fact that Samuel L. Jackson was the go-to tough guy in Hollywood during the 1990s. Due to his popular association with stony killers such as Jules Winnfield in *Pulp Fiction* and Ordell Robbie in *Jackie Brown*, his presence in the narrative constitutes one long, distracting cameo having little to do with race. And finally, it is interesting to note that the main villains in this prequel, the Sith, are largely coded as white. In his Empire building, Chancellor Palpatine represents imperial patriarchy. Although Naboo is a progressive planet in electing a young woman as their monarch, it is Palpatine who pulls the strings. He plays a multi-layered game, using his position of privilege to advance his own career while putting in place what he

needs to move against the Jedi. His lieutenant in *Attack of the Clones*, Count Dooku, is similarly coded in terms of white patriarchy, as he is configured as a grandfather figure to Obi-Wan Kenobi in that he once mentored Qui-Gon Jinn, who in turn mentored Obi-Wan.

Viewers conditioned in a culture where race is usually the default marker of difference have largely ignored such racial complexity. Some of the accusations regarding the first trilogy are legitimate, most notably the portrayal of the Tuskens, the equivalence of blackness with evil in the character of Darth Vader, and the general absence of non-white humans. Lucas clearly adjusted his vision, providing more minority human characters in the prequel trilogy and constructing some aliens, such as the tall, thin Kaminoans and the insect-like Geonosians, so that they would resist racial coding. However, he suffered even more criticism in what audiences perceived were associations between specific aliens and minority groups. Although the portrayal of the Tuskens continued to be problematic, and the accent of Jar Jar Binks was clearly marked as Caribbean, most of these accusations were overstated, representing a cultural Rorschach test whereby viewers grafted their own racial anxieties and preconceptions onto the exotic creatures they saw before them. Despite Lucas's attempt to set his fictional narrative in a galaxy far, far away, racial pressures and expectations overwhelmed his narrative, leading to a fictional world where the politics of representation are anything but black and white.

NOTES

1. See *A Galaxy Not So Far Away: Writers and Artists on Twenty-Five Years of Star Wars*, ed. Glenn Kenny (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), and *Culture, Identity and Technologies in the Star Wars Films: Essays on the Two Trilogies*, ed. Carl Silvio et al. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007).

2. In this chapter, aliens will be considered as racial others while droids will not. Although a definite underclass in both trilogies, droids cannot be associated with particular racial features in Lucas's narrative. For a discussion of droid sentience and slavery in *Star Wars*, see Robert Arp, "If Droids Could Think: Droids as Slaves and Persons," in *Stars Wars and Philosophy: More Powerful than You Can Possibly Imagine*, ed. Kevin S. Decker et al. (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 120–31.

3. See p. 174 in Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 173–87.

4. The Bedouin reference is ironic in that Lucas filmed the desert portions of *A New Hope* in Tunisia, a country that although Islamic has no historic links to this particular group. Not all critics see the Tuskens as Bedouin; Gabriel Estrada notes them as Apache. See p. 79 of his essay "*Star Wars* Episodes I–VI: Coyote and the Force of White Narrative," in *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (London: Routledge, 2008), 69–89.

5. *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*, directed by George Lucas, 2002, 20th Century Fox.

6. Estrada, "*Star Wars* Episodes I–VI," 76.

7. Demonstrating how reading human racial codes into cinematic aliens relies upon human bias, Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. does *not* identify either the Jawas or Chewbacca as representative of Mexican culture. Instead, he denotes the Jawas as Arabic in that they are desert-dwelling merchants who attempt to cheat customers (170). Furthermore, he sees Chewbacca as perhaps indicative of Native Americans (25, 177). See Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., *The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion, and Rebellion in the Star Wars Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005).

8. Wetmore also discusses critics who view the Ewoks as Native American, particularly in their apparent fulfillment of the enlightenment concept of the "noble savage." According to Estrada, the Ewoks represent the Miwak, a California Native American group (78).

9. See p. 170 in Tom Carson, "Jedi Uber Alles," in Kenny, *A Galaxy Not So Far Away*, 160–71.

10. Wetmore, *The Empire Triumphant*, 171.

11. Ibid, 132–33.

12. *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*, directed by George Lucas, 1980, 20th Century Fox.

13. "Lando Calrissian: Pimp of the Galaxy," Facebook, accessed June 15, 2011, www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2201064630.

14. "Darthipedia," accessed June 15, 2011, darth.wikia.com/wiki/Lando_Calrissian.

15. "Lando Calrissian," Twitter, accessed August 20, 2011, twitter.com/#!/lando_cal.

16. For more information on Blaxploitation, including its origins, successes, and excesses, see Mikel J. Koven, *Blaxploitation Cinema* (London: Oldcastle Books, 2010).

17. Although subsidiary to his visual blackness, there is also an auditory component. In choosing James Earl Jones to voice Darth Vader, George Lucas would have, intentionally or not, associated the character with blackness in the minds of 1970s moviegoers. The actor was more likely cast for the deep, base-like quality of his voice, which would denote power and potency. Still, on the aural register Vader was clearly marked as black.

18. See Andrew Gordon, "*Star Wars*: A Myth for Our Time," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (Fall 1978): 314–26. Gordon early on recognized Lucas's debt to Joseph Campbell.

19. See pp. 100–101 in Clyde Taylor, "The Master Text and the Jeddi Doctrine," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 96–104.

20. See p. xv of Daniel Bernardi, "Introduction: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema," in Bernardi, *The Persistence of Whiteness*, xv–xxvi.

21. See Christopher Deis, "May the Force (Not) Be with You: 'Race Critical' Readings and the *Star Wars* Universe," in Silvio, *Culture, Identity and Technologies*, 77–103. Deis notes that the changing color palette in the original trilogy parallels a decrease in diversity: "As the narrative progresses, and the democratic institutions of the Republic decay and eventually collapse, we see the beginnings of an increasingly homogenous universe. Here, as color literally disappears from the film, the diversity of peoples and aliens literally disappears as well" (81).

22. *Chasing Amy*, directed by Kevin Smith, 1997, Miramax Films.
23. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 10.
24. Estrada, "*Star Wars* Episodes I–VI," 83.
25. George Lucas, "*Star Wars*: Lucas Strikes Back," accessed July 10, 2011, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/394542.stm.
26. J. Hoberman, "All Droid Up," *Village Voice*, accessed June 1, 2011, www.villagevoice.com/1999-05-18/film/all-droid-up.
27. "Jar Jar Binks Faded," *The Urban Dictionary*, accessed July 10, 2011, www.urbandictionary.com.
28. *Jar Jar Binks: The F! True Hollywood Story*, accessed July 10, 2011, www.imdb.com/title/tt0366633.
29. Wetmore, *The Empire Triumphant*, 163.
30. Ibid, 157–59.
31. Ibid, 158.
32. See Bruce Gottlieb, "The Merchant of Menace," *Slate*, accessed July 10, 2011, www.slate.com/id/29394.
33. Matt Osso, "More on Jar Jar Binks and the New *Star Wars*," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed July 10, 2011, articles.latimes.com/1999/jun/05/entertainment/ca-44269.

3

Beyond Judeo-Christianity

Star Wars and the Great Eastern Religions

Julien Fielding

After the release of *Star Wars*, practitioners from most religious traditions tried to find parallels between the film's message and their own. However, Christian interpretations have been the most numerous, such writers perceiving the Jedi Knights as Crusaders from the Middle Ages, the Force as God and "Luke's development as analogous to a serious Christian's progression as a follower of Jesus"; Darth Maul, with his red face and horns, as Satan; and pride as the cause of Anakin's "fall."[1] Christians also find it significant that in the last three films, the hero's name is Luke,[2] seen as referring to Jesus's disciple and the "author" of the third Gospel.[3] Luke's twin sister's name, Leia (Carrie Fisher), could be a variant of Leah, which is from Hebrew, meaning "cow." *Genesis* 29 tells us that this matriarch of Israel was Jacob's first wife and the sister of Rachel. Leah and Jacob, later named Israel, had seven sons. Finally, Christians focus on the film's dualistic viewpoint, pointing out that both Han Solo (Harrison Ford) and Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) undergo a resurrection, and that at the end of the films Darth Vader is redeemed.

Increasingly, scholars are uncovering the film's Eastern roots. Examining character names in the *Star Wars* universe proves to be revelatory. Luke Skywalker's surname[4] might come from an American Indian tradition; however, as one poster who was responding to a blog on *The Vaishnava Voice* noted, Skywalker is the English translation of the Sanskrit word *daikini*.[5] A *daikini* is a female demon in Indian folk belief. In Tibetan the word becomes *khadroma*. When broken down, *kha* means "celestial space," *dro* means *walking* (my emphasis); and *ma* indicates the feminine. Therefore, in Tibetan Buddhism, this same female being "moves on the highest level of reality."[6] As one writer explains, "The *dakini* is a manifestation of the

energy of enlightened awareness in the stream of consciousness of the individual male practitioner, which awakens the consciousness to the spiritual path, thus playing the role of the archetypal figure the Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung designated as the *anima*."[7] This connection between Skywalker and the Sanskrit term might seem to be a stretch, until you consider that in *Willow*, a 1988 film for which Lucas and Bob Dolman contributed the screenplay, the baby Elora Danan is said to belong to the species Daikini. Danan means, by the way, "child of prophecy, the daughter of the Sun and Moon, and future empress of all kingdoms." She is the powerful child who is prophesized to appear and unite the people.[8] In *Star Wars*, too, Luke Skywalker plays an important part in the prophecy that a "chosen one" will restore balance to the Force. As Lucas said, the second and third drafts of his screenplay began with the quote: "And in time of greatest despair there shall come a savior and he shall be known as: The Son of the Sun."[9]

Queen Padmé Amidala (Natalie Portman) is Luke Skywalker's mother and the wife of Anakin. Her first name comes from the Sankrit word Padma; the lotus flower that is a symbol of purity and lucidity. Many Hindu deities and Buddhist figures sit on a lotus, including Brahma, Lakshmi, Buddha, and Maitreya. It is said that after Siddhartha was born, he walked, and in those places where he had stepped, lotus plants grew. Her surname Amidala seems to recall the Sankrit word Amitabha, also known as Amida, the "Buddha of measureless light." He is thought to reside in Sukhavati, which is the Pure Land or Western Paradise, and is frequently depicted as seated in the middle of a lotus blossom. As a character, Queen Amidala is brave, loyal, and selfless. Even when her life is threatened, she never shirks from duty, believing that her subjects must come first. When her reign ended, instead of indulging in her private life, she sought a position in the Senate so that she could present a rational and reasonable perspective. Always a champion of peace and diplomacy, Padmé is ruled by her compassion for others.

A Jedi apprentice, called a Padawan, is the combination of two Sanskrit words with *Pada* meaning foot and *wan* or *van* meaning forest. In Hinduism, the third stage of life for a twice-born male is the *vanaprastya*, or the stage of the forest-dweller, during which, once a person reaches retirement age, he leaves his possessions with his children and he, with his wife, retires to the forest as a hermit. Although not full renunciation, the forest-dweller's life reduces his pursuit of material goods and physical pleasures. Leaving one's home for a life of wandering in the forest continued in the Buddhist tradition. We know by watching *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* that Obi-Wan Kenobi (Sir Alec Guinness) retires to a cave, also common for an ascetic in the Buddhist tradition; Yoda lives in a quasi-cave surrounded by trees.

As for Yoda, Steven J. Rosen wonders if his name might refer to the Sanskrit word yoga, which means "zeal or hard work." During Luke's training

with Yoda, the diminutive being advocates using certain postures (at one point Luke is performing a one-handed handstand with Yoda perched on his foot) to train and subdue the mind—and to overcome his fear. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna that "even for the man of discernment who strives, the harassing senses forcibly seize the mind. Restraining all the senses, one should sit, yogically disciplined, focused . . . for if one's senses are under control one's mentality is ground."[10] Rosen also says that "Yoda's name is closely linked to the Sanskrit *yuddha*, which means war. Accordingly, this character teaches a chivalrous form of warfare, imbued with ethics and spirituality." Furthermore, after making some comparisons, Rosen wonders if perhaps Lucas's inspiration[11] might have come from the *Ramayana*, which also features a kidnapped princess who must be saved by a hero assisted by various beings, including the half-human/half-monkey Hanuman,[12] or even the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which we find a guru-disciple relationship, an emphasis on overcoming desire and anger, and the idea of a "Force" pervading the universe.[13]

Further, we can read chapter 16 of the *Bhagavad Gita* and apply what it says to just about any of the "bad guys" in *Star Wars*, including everyone from Emperor Palpatine to Anakin once he nears his transformation to Darth Vader. "Demonic men" are "subject to insatiable desire, filled with intoxicating hypocrisy and pride . . . having fastened onto false views through delusion, they follow the polluting rules of conduct." The chapter continues by saying that because these people are tangled in the web of delusion, are obsessed with the gratification of desires, and are dependent on egotism, violence, and pride, they are hurled into demonic wombs. "Desire, anger, and greed: that is the destruction of the self, the triple gate of hell."[14]

In *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke must fly to the Dagobah System, so that he can begin his Jedi training with Yoda.[15] Dagoba is the Sinhalese word for the more commonly known Sanskrit term, *stupa*. Originally, memorial monuments over the mortal remains of the historical Buddha and other saints, *stupas* are symbolic reminders of various events in the Buddha's life. The word Dagoba was "originally Dhatugarbha, literally 'womb of objects,' i.e., a repository of the Buddha's relics around which a stupa, later a temple was built and around which a *vihara* (Buddhist monastery) arose. Dagoba later became *pagoda*."[16] Interestingly enough, *stupas* are traditionally bell-shaped and topped by a long, narrow spire. When we see Yoda's abode, it looks uncannily like a stupa.

The surname of Count Dooku (Christopher Lee), a fallen Jedi Master who is now a powerful Sith Lord known as Darth Tyranus, is Japanese for poison.[17] However, his name also sounds very much like *dukkha*, which, in Buddhism, means suffering. He certainly brings suffering to the galaxy through his attachment to greed, hatred, and ignorance. Two characters bear the last name of Fett, including Jango (Temuera Morrison), a bounty

hunter, assassin, and mercenary; and his "son," Boba, who when he grows up, also becomes a bounty hunter—his prize being Han Solo. In the context of Buddhism, again, Fett could refer to "fetter," which is the translation of Siddhartha's son, Rahula. In one version of the Buddha's story, it is said that when he learned that his son had been born, he responded, "a fetter has arisen." In *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*, we learn the backstory of Jango and Boba. Apparently, a Jedi named Sifo-Dyas commissioned the mysterious Kaminoans to create for him a clone army. Jango agrees to be the genetic source of the clones with the stipulation that, in addition to his large fee, he will receive an unaltered clone of himself to raise as his son. Although not addressed in the films, the *Star Wars* expanded universe suggests that Jango wanted to raise a son, because when his own parents were murdered he became an orphan. Jango's desire for a family leads to the creation of what is essentially a morally "neutral" army.

Names and places that have an East Asian connection aren't as numerous as those having a Sanskrit or Vedic one; however, their significance to the sextet is perhaps more important. For instance, the word Jedi derives from the Japanese term *jidai geki*, which is a "period film" that retells old legends, re-creates epic historical events, and keeps the spirit of the samurai alive. *Geki* literally means theater and these films and television series have roots in Japan's Kabuki and No theater. In general, the *jidai geki* refers to movies set before 1868, when Japan's modern era began.[18] Director Akira Kurosawa has made some of the most popular films of this type, including *Ran* (1985), *Yojimbo* (1961), *The Seven Samurai* (1954), and *Hidden Fortress*, a film that Lucas said inspired elements in *Star Wars*. Jedi masters Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Sir Alec Guinness and Ewan McGregor) have names that derive from East Asian traditions. Both characters are instrumental in the development of the *Star Wars* mythology. Not only do Jedi Knights represent a "more civilized time" but they also educate Anakin Skywalker and Luke in the ways of the Force, imparting them with a strict moral code.

The name Qui-Gon indicates the Chinese, and specifically Daoist, concept of Qigong, sometimes written as *ch'i-kung*. "Everything that ever existed, at all times, is made of *qi*, including inanimate matter, humans and animals, the sky, ideas and emotions, demons and ghosts, the undifferentiated state of wholeness, and the world when it is teeming with different beings." Also referred to as "vital energy," *qi* also connects to human thoughts and feelings and the physical body.[19] *Gong* means the "skill of working with or cultivating self-discipline and achievement. The art of *qigong* consists primarily of meditation, relaxation, physical movement, mind-body integration, and breathing exercises. . . . When the practitioners achieve a sufficient skill level (master), they can direct or emit external *qi* for the purpose of healing others."[20] Qi, when written in Romanized Japanese, becomes *ki*, which is the first name of Ki-Adi Mundi.[21]

When speaking about Obi-Wan Kenobi, not only did Joseph Campbell point out that the character had a "Japanese-sounding name . . . but also the look and demeanor of the Japanese sword master, a venerable teacher of the art and spirituality of swordplay."[22] Part of Obi-Wan Kenobi's name seems to refer to the everyday costume worn by a samurai ("those who serve"), specifically the kimono.[23] Traditionally this costume would be silk and held together by an *obi* belt. The samurai normally wore his sword, typically the long *katana*, pushed through this belt. Obi-Wan's last name seems to derive from this fighting tradition, because as we see in the term *kendo*, which in Japanese means "the way of the sword," *ken* meaning sword. As for the principles of weaponry, the first thing a samurai learned was swordsmanship, then "lancing, riding, archery, shooting, and any other martial arts."[24] These warriors also became scholars and physicians. Some taught Confucian classics; others went into the religious orders, especially the Rinzai order of Zen Buddhism.[25] The samurai were supposed to live according to the *bushido* code, which stressed filial piety, modesty, courtesy, frugality, patience, tolerance, valor, loyalty, and duty.[26] Furthermore, they were to avoid useless talk, personal luxury, and sexual feelings.

The training for a Jedi is similar to that of a samurai or Zen monk. After exhibiting a high "midi-chlorian" count in his or her bloodstream, a prospective Jedi began training in infancy. At this point one severs all connections to one's family. In the initial stages of training, one Jedi master trains a group of hopefuls. We see this in *Attack of the Clones*, which shows Yoda instructing a group of "younglings." As these children mature, a Padawan pairs with a single master, who will continue his or her one-on-one training. Although combat is not the Jedi's first impulse—as Mace Windu says of the Jedi, "we are keepers of the peace not soldiers"—when he or she does fight, that person uses a lightsaber, a weapon that Obi-Wan Kenobi says is "elegant." "The Jedi use the lightsaber as a symbol of their dedication to combat in defense, not attack, and of their philosophical concern for finely tuned mind and body skills. Ambassadors, mediators and counselors, Jedi are warriors only as a last resort."[27] For further evidence of the connection between the Jedi and the samurai: "Lucas expressed his interest in feudal Japan to artist Ralph McQuarrie when he asked him to come up with the first renderings of the *Star Wars* look and even offered images of samurai warriors for inspiration."

What about the *wan* in Obi-Wan? It could simply mean "arm" as it does in Japanese, or if from Chinese, the surname Wan means 10,000, which has been associated with longevity, "the most highly esteemed value of the fivefold happinesses. . . . Expressions of the desire for longevity can be traced back as far as the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600–256 BCE), with phrases such as *wan shou* (ten thousand lives) and *junzi wan nian*, meaning nobility and 10,000 years."[28] As it says in the *Tao de Ching*, the "Tao gave birth to

the One, the One to the Two; the Tao produced the Three and the Three the 10,000 beings." Throughout the centuries, the Chinese have also used 10,000 to indicate a kind of "upper limit," indicating whatever is or should be plentiful. We see this especially in the writings of Chuang Tzu. He writes that "if we calculate the number of things that exist, the count certainly does not stop at 10,000. Yes we set a limit and speak of the '10,000 things' because we select a number that is large and agree to apply it to them."[29]

Other characters and places have East Asian names, such as Han Solo, the anti-heroic gunslinger in the last three films. His first name could refer to the Chinese dynasty that lasted from 206 BCE to 220 CE, for it was during this period that poetry, literature, and philosophy flourished, especially Confucianism, which formed the basis of conduct. Also during this time, Buddhism reached China, and philosophical Daoism was taking shape.[30] Han could also have a Japanese original, for in Zen monasteries, a *han* is a wooden board on which a rhythm is beaten three times a day. "Often the following verse appears on the *han*: Heed, monks! Be mindful in practice. Time flies like an arrow; It does not wait for you."[31] His surname Solo is largely just indicative of his nature. He is, at least in the early stages, a loner who cares only about himself.

Even though Padmé Amidala's name has a Sanskrit origin, her makeup and costumes, especially in *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*, are reminiscent of East Asian traditions. For example, several of her hairstyles and her beauty spots were inspired by ancient Mongolian styles, and her white face paint is like that worn by the Japanese geisha, Mongolians, and actors in Kabuki theater and Chinese opera. In China, women also painted a red beauty spot on their cheeks. In *Phantom Menace*, Queen Amidala wears nearly a dozen outfits in all, but only a few of them are of interest. The Queen's Throne Room gown, which is red with a black faux fur hem, was inspired by Chinese Imperial court styles. Ever since prehistoric times in China, red has signified a life-giving color and has long been associated with wealth. For instance, during the New Year celebration, children often receive money in a red envelope with the hope of ensuring their good health. Her Palpatine Office Outfit I, which she wears before she appears before the Galactic Senate, is essentially a Japanese kimono with long Mongolian-style sleeves. On her head she wears an elaborate "Shiraya" fan headdress that is decorated with "Veda pearl beading."[32] To complement her episode I Senate Gown, which she wore while begging the Senate to help her people, she sports a Mongolian-influenced headdress that almost looks like a set of horns capped by red and gold cylinders. And finally, her Celebration Gown, which is white, has a jeweled collar inspired by a Japanese parasol.[33]

Other characters have Japanese- or Asian-inspired clothing. In *Attack of the Clones*, Jango Fett hires female assassin Zam Wesell to kill Queen Ami-

dala. Actually a changeling, she is dressed in purple and has a veil over her face, looking remarkably like a Ninja warrior. Although each Jedi Knight is dressed a bit differently, all wear a variation of the Japanese kimono. As costume designer John Mollo said, "George (Lucas) wanted (Obi-Wan) to look part monk and part Samurai warrior."[34] Even Darth Maul (Ray Park), the red-faced Sith warrior, wore a "black, layered, kimono-style underrobe," and his cloak was "inspired by a photograph of a Tibetan lama taken about 1940."[35] Darth Vader's mask and helmet, too, came from Japan. During the feudal period, warriors wore a *kabuto*, or Japanese helmet, which usually had a bowl-like crown that flared at the back of the neck. As for his mask, that was modeled on the *mempo* or mask of iron, steel, or lacquered leather that samurai warriors of the upper ranks usually wore to protect their faces.[36] Of *Episode IV—A New Hope*, Mark Hamill remarked that he felt it "was a very Japanese movie. Darth Vader's costume and his duel with Ben Kenobi are very Samurai."[37] What's interesting is that, as homage to Kurosawa, Lucas had even considered making the entire film in Japanese with subtitles, and casting Japanese actors in several key roles. "This was actually when I was looking for Ben Kenobi," Lucas said. "I was going to use Toshiro Mifune; we even made a preliminary inquiry. If I'd gotten Mifune, I would've also used a Japanese princess."[38]

Hundreds of species and cultures make up the Jedi, so it's a bit difficult to generalize about their appearance. However, the human members do sport a very distinctive hairstyle. While in training, Padawans keep their hair extremely short with the exception of a single, long braid. When they pass their trials, thus being elevated to knighthood, their braid is cut off with a lightsaber. Several Jedi masters are completely bald, such as Mace Windu and Yoda. Some have long hair and facial hair, such as Qui-Gon, and a few others, such as Oppo Rancisis, Yaddle, and Even Piell, wear their hair in a "Jedi topknot." The topknot has long been associated, particularly in Eastern traditions, with religion. Shiva, a figure of renunciation, is often depicted with his matted hair tied in a topknot, the river Ganga sprouting from it. In Japan, the samurai pulled their hair into a "chomage" or topknot.

The eclecticism of Lucas's vision is also evident when we look at a few other words found in his films. In the *Star Wars* universe, Naboo is a provincial planet populated by art-loving and highly refined humans and the indigenous Gungans. When written as Nabu, the word refers to the Babylonian god of wisdom. A dangerous and shifty podracer from *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* is named Sebulba. When written Xibalba, this is the name for the Mayan underworld. Qui-Gon's last name Jinn means "hidden" or "concealed" in Arabic. In Islam, "jinn are ambiguous creatures, somewhat like human beings and somewhat like angels."[39] One similarity between humans and jinn is that both can choose between good and evil; one difference is that humans are made from clay and *jinn* come

from fire. (Angels come from light.) One of the doomed Jedi, a cerulean blue woman, is Aayla Secura. Her first name is Arabic for sublime. Her last name, obviously of Latin origin, is from *securus*, which means safe; secure; without care. In *Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin fights Obi-Wan on the volcanic planet of Mustafar. This word recalls the Arabic name Mustafa, which means "chosen one" and is one of Mohammed's names. The home world of Mace Windu (Samuel L. Jackson), a Jedi Master, is Haruun Kal. If spelled Haroun or Harun, this word means "lofty or exalted," and is the Arabic form of Aaron. Tatooine, Luke Skywalker's home planet, is a real place in Tunisia where one finds a "fabulous series of old grain stores." The filmmakers were going to use it as a street in Mos Eisley, but didn't get to. Lucas "integrated that name into the work-in-progress fourth draft."[40] Queen Apailana (Keisha Castle-Hughes) is ruler of Naboo in *Revenge of the Sith*. Apparently, her name was originally spelled Apairana, which is an "ancient house of the Maori people." The actress who plays the role is herself a Maori from New Zealand.[41]

What's particularly interesting about Lucas's ubiquitous use of East Asian and Indian terminology is that he generally employs it for the films' chief "good guys," the Jedi Knights, and the heroine of the first three films, Queen Amidala.[42] The only "good" primary characters who don't have names from these traditions are Anakin and his son and daughter. Until the last film, though, Anakin isn't a "good guy" at all, not in a black and white, and certainly not in a Jedi sense. He's unpredictable, reckless, disrespectful, undisciplined, selfish, violent, lustful, prideful, and impatient. Furthermore, throughout much of the films, the Jedi Knights differ on how to view Anakin. Qui-Gon believes strongly that he is the Chosen One, but others, including Mace Windu and Obi-Wan, have their doubts. The latter believes he is too old and too emotionally attached to become a Jedi.

Most of the names of the "bad guys" have either a Latin origin, such as Bib Fortuna, a servant of Jabba the Hut; or are self-describing terms, such as Greedo, a greedy character; General Grievous, a ruthless hunter of the Jedi, or Elan Sleazebaggano, a guy who tries to sell Obi-Wan "death sticks." Senator Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid), the cause of all corruption in the *Star Wars* universe, has a name that sounds like a mixture of palpitate and palatine, conjuring up an image of a man of royal privilege who causes terror. In his Sith form, he is called Darth Sidious, which undoubtedly comes from the Latin-derived insidious. His name is appropriate, because he is as harmful as he is enticing, seductive, and treacherous. Darth Maul, Qui-Gon Jinn's killer, also couldn't have a more appropriate name, as the original Latin means to grind and as a noun the word means a "heavy hammer used for driving wedges."

Many assume that the vision of *Star Wars* is predominantly Judeo-Christian, because Lucas was raised Methodist—although he apparently "loathed

the religion's self-serving piety and especially resented Sunday School, which was worse than regular school in his eyes"[43]—and even visited his housekeeper's German Lutheran congregation, which he apparently found to be more "interesting and different."[44] The truth of the matter is that Lucas doesn't seem to subscribe to any one religious system: "From an early age, Lucas had been interested in the fact that all over the world, religions and peoples had created different ideas of God and the spirit. 'The Force' of others is what all basic religions are based on, especially the Eastern ones, which is essentially that there is a force, God, whatever you want to call it."[45]

Several elements in the films do seem to have a Judeo-Christian influence, such as Luke and Leia's names, Anakin's "virgin birth," and the concept of a "chosen one." However, if we survey other world mythologies, we see that stories of heroes resulting from a virgin birth and being seen as the "chosen one" aren't particularly unique to this tradition. As far as the virgin birth is concerned, many ancient, especially Greco-Roman, deities purportedly were the result of "virgin births." Mithra, the ancient Persian god of light, was born on December 25 from a rock, attended in some versions by shepherds. King Sargon of Babylonia was born of a virgin, hidden in a basket, put in the river, and found by a lowborn person. Hercules and Dionysus were the products of sexual union between the god Zeus and their mothers. It is said that Siddhartha was born after appearing to his mother as a white elephant.

For further proof of the Judeo-Christian influence, writers point to the film's theme of redemption, something particularly associated with Christianity; the battle between good and evil, represented by the Jedi and Sith; and the diabolical "temptation" of Anakin. Concerning the idea of temptation, in Siddhartha's "biography," he, too, was tempted by a demon named Mara. Obi-Wan Kenobi's hermitic desert life in *Episode IV—A New Hope* seems similar to that of St. Anthony. The difference, of course, is that Obi-Wan wasn't in the desert for spiritual reasons. He was in exile after the Empire's massacre of the Jedi, and only lived on Tatooine so that he could watch over Luke Skywalker, who was being reared by Anakin's family. One place name that seems to come directly from the *Hebrew Bible* is the ringed planet Geonosis, which is in the outer rim territories. Here one finds large factories for the production of droids and weapons. The inhabitants, insect-like creatures, seem to enjoy watching gladiatorial fighting, as they take Anakin, Obi-Wan, and Amidala captive, put them in the ring, and force them to fight to the death for everyone's amusement. Geonosis, which sounds a lot like Genesis, has served as a "hideout" for Count Dooku and Jango Fett.

So what about the film's "good vs. evil" theme? If we view the films as they were released in the theaters, watching just episodes IV through VI, the good and evil theme is much more pronounced. Darth Vader really does

emerge as the black-clad pinnacle of evil. As Lucas said about the character, he "became such an icon in the first film [episode IV] that that icon of evil took over everything, more than I intended." However, if one watches them as Lucas intended, episodes I through VI, then, as the writer-director says on the DVD featurette *The Chosen One*, which is included with *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*, Vader is revealed "to be this pathetic character at the end of the movie. . . . By adding [episodes I, II, and III] people begin to see the tragedy of Darth Vader as it was originally intended to be. The person that you thought was the villain is really the victim, and that the story is really about the villain trying to regain his humanity. It becomes really the story of Darth Vader's redemption." As Lucas later explains in the documentary "No one who is evil thinks they are evil; they always think they are doing good even though they're not [episode III] is a matter of how a person who is good turns to becoming evil."

Lucas is adamant that "Anakin is the chosen one; even when he's Darth Vader." So how does this fit within the Judeo-Christian mythos? Usually when we think of chosen ones, we think of Jesus, Moses, Abraham, David, and Jacob. None of them embraced the "Dark Side of the force." They were heroic because they rejected "evil" and followed God. When Emperor Palpatine tempts Anakin with promises of power and longevity, Anakin struggles with himself, but ultimately he rejects the Jedi and chooses the path of the Sith. However, that's far too simplistic an explanation of what really happens. From the beginning, even when Anakin was a child, the Jedi Knights, especially Mace Windu, a Jedi who is on par with Yoda, are ambivalent about whether he could be the Chosen One. And even throughout his training, Anakin exhibits un-Jedi-like behavior that should have gotten him expelled from the order. For instance, in *Attack of the Clones*, someone is trying to assassinate Padmé, so Anakin is assigned to protect her. When he has a "vision" that his mother is suffering, he leaves Padmé behind to return to Tatooine. After finding his mother a Tusken Raiders' captive, he is overcome with rage and slaughters them—men, women, and children. He justifies this by saying that they are "animals." Anakin also manipulates the Jedi rules anytime it suits his purposes. Early in episode II he says that "being around Padmé is intoxicating." Obi-Wan cautions him to remember his commitment to the Jedi. Despite this, Anakin persists in pursuing Padmé, who also dissuades him from a romantic relationship by asking, "isn't it forbidden for a Jedi to love?" Anakin replies: "Attachment is forbidden. Possession is forbidden. Compassion, which I would define as unconditional love, is central to a Jedi's life, so you might say we are encouraged to love."

Anakin is blind to the way things are—seeing situations as he wants to see them—and he's blind to his own faults. To see how deluded he is, we only need to watch episode III, especially the scene during which he and

Palpatine discuss the natures of the Jedi and the Sith. Palpatine mentions that "all who gain power are afraid to lose it. Even the Jedi." Anakin counters with "the Jedi use their power for good." Palpatine says that good is a point of view; "The Sith and the Jedi are similar in almost every way, including their quest for greater power." Anakin: "The Sith rely on their passion for their strength. They think inward, only about themselves. . . . The Jedi are selfless, they only care about others." What's tragic about what Anakin says is that even though he understands the Jedi perspective, he doesn't internalize it. He actually thinks and behaves more like a Sith. With these few examples, we can see that the seeds of the Sith have been in Anakin from the beginning. And these personal flaws are magnified when he joins Emperor Palpatine. As the newly named Darth Vader, he is told to go to the Jedi Temple, where a massacre of the innocents, so to speak, ensues. He then flies off to kill all of the members of the Separatist Council. When we try to reconcile these elements with the Judeo-Christian tradition, perhaps our only option is to see Darth Vader as Lucifer, the angel who fell because of pride. Pride is certainly one of Anakin's flaws. In *Revenge of the Sith*, he boasts to Count Dooku that his powers have doubled since they had both met. Dooku responds, "twice the pride, double the fall." But again, seeing Anakin/Darth Vader—the Chosen One—as Lucifer is problematic. Who then are Luke and Leia?

To say that the film is about good vs. evil seems overly simplistic. Our "hero" Anakin isn't good or evil. He simply makes bad choices, and those bad choices have karmic consequences. As author Matthew Bortolin writes, "Vader becomes trapped by the dark side; every evil act he commits takes him deeper into the dark side and makes it harder and harder for him to break the karmic chain of his malefactions until evil seems his only choice."[46] As Obi-Wan Kenobi says about Vader, he "was seduced by the Dark Side of the Force. He ceased to be Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened, the good man . . . was destroyed." As the *Dhammapada* reminds us, "As rust corrupts the very iron that formed it, so transgressions lead their doer to states of woe . . . bad conduct is corruption in a person . . . evil traits corrupt people in both this world and the next. More corrupt than these is ignorance, the greatest corruption."[47]

Buddhism doesn't claim, though, that once a person makes a wrong decision he or she is "doomed." Vader has taken the "wrong path," for many years; however, he is still capable of doing selfless, compassionate actions. As Luke tells Leia in *Return of the Jedi*, "There is good in [Darth Vader]. I've felt it. He won't turn me over to the Emperor. I can save him. I can turn him back to the good side." Before Amidala dies in *Revenge of the Sith*, her words—"I know there's good in him"—are nearly identical to Luke's. What Vader must do is to let go of his hate and develop compassion. The Emperor knows that hatred makes a Jedi weak, and he encourages Anakin

and Luke to give in to their aggressive feelings. To Luke in episode VI, he says, "The hate is swelling in you now. Take your Jedi weapon. Use it. I am unarmed. Strike me down with it. Give in to your anger. With each passing moment you make yourself more my servant." He even claims that Luke's compassion will be his undoing, but quite the opposite happens. Luke's compassion for his father ends up "saving" Vader and the galaxy.

Unlike the monotheistic traditions, Eastern religions don't see in black-and-white terms. And, for the most part, neither do the Jedi. In *Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin says, "If you are against me, you're my enemy." Obi-Wan replies: "Only a Sith deals in absolutes." In *Return of the Jedi*, Luke asks Obi-Wan why he lied to him about his father. Obi-Wan replies, "What I told you was true . . . from a certain point of view. . . . Luke, you're going to find out that many of the truths that we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view." In Buddhism, seeing the world in dualistic terms stems from wrong understanding and wrong view. As Zen master Shunryu Suzuki explained, our body and mind are both two and one; plural and singular: "Our usual understanding of life is dualistic: you and I; this and that; good and bad. . . . These discriminations are themselves the awareness of the universal existence. 'You' means to be aware of the universe in the form of you; 'I' means to be aware of it in the form of I. You and I are just swinging doors. . . . This moment the swinging door is opening in one direction, and the next moment the door is swinging in the opposite direction. Moment after moment each one of us repeats this activity." In the end, he says, good and bad are only in one's mind.[48] And in the "big mind" there is no difference between heaven and earth; man and woman; teacher and disciple; everything has the same value; everything is Buddha.[49]

Buddhism teaches that there are two kinds of truth—relative and worldly. The first kind is of interest here as it easily applies to Anakin. He claims that he's suffering, but why? He doesn't feel that he has enough power, he is sad that his mother is dead, he longs to be with Padmé even though he's not supposed to, he's not moving fast enough along the career track to Jedi Master, and so on. Can we really say that Anakin is suffering, when these sources of his pain are subjective? Suffering depends largely on the way a person perceives his or her situation; therefore, it is relative truth. After all, another person in Anakin's situation might not suffer from any of these situations. As Palpatine rightly suggests, good and evil, too, are relative concepts. Most religions say that killing is wrong; however, adherents justify killing based on their perception of a situation. If an audience watching *Star Wars* saw the Jedi Knights kill Darth Vader and the Emperor, they would rejoice, because they wouldn't see killing in this situation as "bad." But should the Emperor kill Yoda or Luke Skywalker, the audience would be outraged, demanding justice. Both sides kill, which religion prohibits, and yet one side is "justified" in its actions and the other is not.

Taoism is in accordance with Buddhism in its rejection of absolutes and dualism. As it says in chapter 20 of the *Dao de Ching*, between yes and no what is the difference? Between good and evil how great is the distance?[50] With equal measure of white and dark, the yin-yang symbol embodies the perfect state of being. In this symbol, too, light is found in darkness, and darkness is found in light. *Star Wars* supports this. Many of the Sith Lords were once Jedi Knights, and there exists a master-student chain between the "good" and "evil" characters. For instance, Yoda trained Count Dooku who trained Qui-Gon who trained Obi-Wan who trained Anakin. What's particularly interesting about this is that despite their best efforts, good characters still produced evil students and evil teachers produced good students. Furthermore, *Star Wars* doesn't advocate the slaughter of the Sith Lords; in fact, the overall message of the films isn't to go to war, but to reach agreement through diplomatic relations. (As Queen Amidala states, war is a failure to listen.) Because this isn't possible, chaos ensues. According to Daoism, chaos arises in the universe when too much yang overshadows yin or too much yin overpowers yang. In essence, it is the result of disharmony and imbalance, not the presence of evil.

Despite his Jedi training, Anakin, as Yoda and Buddhists would say, fails to live in the present; he grasps at impermanent things, such as ego, love, life, and power and is hindered by the three poisons, greed, anger, and ignorance. He also fails to realize that suffering is a part of life. To get an idea of what Anakin should have learned during his training, we need to look at *The Empire Strikes Back*. When Luke arrives on Dagobah, he finds a swampy planet, teeming with snakes, bats, and lizards, and a small figure living in a dome-shaped abode. Expecting Yoda to be someone much bigger, more masterful—a great warrior—Luke is shocked to learn that his wizened and cheerful host is none other than the revered Jedi Master. Yoda, an ancestor of the shaman and yogi, is "master of both the powers of nature and of those found deep within himself, although this mastery is often hidden behind a simple, naïve façade."[51]

On Dagobah, Luke has entered the "sacred grove," where he will learn about the "Force." Of the Force, Yoda says, "life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. . . . You must feel the Force around you; here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere, yes. Even between the land and the ship." Yoda explains that "a Jedi's strength flows from the Force." Of it, Obi-Wan Kenobi says that "it gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together." On the *Millennium Falcon*, Obi-Wan tells Luke that "a Jedi can feel the Force flowing through him." Luke: "You mean it controls your actions?" Obi-Wan: "Partially, but it also obeys your commands." What Yoda and Obi-Wan are describing could very well be what the Taoists call the *Tao* ("the way"). In chapter 25 of the *Tao Te Ching*, we

learn that the Tao was born before heaven and earth; it is silent and void; and it is the mother of the world.[52] Chapter 34 tells us that the Tao is "broad, reaching left as well as right. The myriad creatures depend on it for life."[53] As a text from the third century CE explains: "The great Tao embraces Heaven and Earth, nourishes all lives, governs the myriad workings (of the world). Formless, imageless . . . it gives birth to the myriad species."[54]

In the writings of Chuang Tzu, the author is asked where the Dao exists. He responds, "There's no place it doesn't exist." Perhaps irritated by this, the other man presses him, telling him to be more specific. Just as Yoda gave his short list of interconnected beings, Chuang Tzu explains, "It is in the ant. It is in the panic grass. It is in the tiles and shard. It is in the piss and shit . . . you must not expect to find the Way in any particular place—there is no thing that escapes its presence."[55] The Dao in its tangible form on earth is cosmic energy or *qi*, which is the vital power of the Tao at work in the world. "It is a continuously changing, forever flowing force, an energy that can appear and disappear, can be strong and weak, can be controlled and overwhelming."[56] In Chinese thought, the universe itself is sacred, and by extension so is the human body, which is a microcosm of the cosmos. *Qi*, or vital energy, comes from the Tao, and all things, from rocks to spirits, are composed of *qi*. Furthermore, it flows through channels or meridians in the earth, giving life and energy to all creatures. Humans can assess and manipulate *qi* found in the material realm through *feng shui*; they can do the same with the *qi* found in their bodies through meditation and visualization exercises, and by eating certain foods.

Yoda also teaches Luke to be always "in the present," to be serious, controlled, patient, self-sacrificing, and even-minded and compassionate. He's also cautioned to be aware of the Dark Side's allies, "anger, fear, and aggression." When Luke asks him if the Dark Side is stronger, Yoda says, "No. Quicker, easier, more seductive." Luke: "But how am I to know the good side from the bad?" Yoda: "You will know . . . when you are calm, at peace, passive. A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense, never for attack." Luke's training on developing the mind, being peaceful and living in the present is undeniably Buddhist. As Suzuki says, "When we do something with a quiet, simple clear mind, we have no notion or shadows, and our activity is strong and straightforward."[57] Furthermore, what Yoda says during *Revenge of the Sith* could have come straight from the Buddha's mouth.[58] When Anakin is agonizing over his premonitions of "pain, suffering, death," Yoda says, "The fear of loss is a path to the Dark Side. Death is a natural part of life. . . . Mourn them do not. Miss them do not." At another time, he says that a person should "rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force." In his writings, Suzuki also talks about death, explaining that "we die and we do not die"[59] and that "our life and death

are the same thing. When we realize this fact we have no fear of death and we have no actual difficulty in our life."[60]

Anakin is unable to understand that death and life are the same thing. As a result he clings to everyone around him, even though Yoda cautions that "attachment leads to jealousy. The shadow of greed that is. Train yourself to let go . . . of everything you fear to lose." During another part of the film, Yoda states that "fear is the path to the Dark Side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." When the Buddha arrived in the town of Kalamas named Kesaputta, he announced that "a person who is greedy, hating and deluded, overpowered by greed, hatred and delusion, his thoughts controlled by them, will destroy life, take what is not given, engage in sexual misconduct and tell lies; he will also prompt others to do likewise. Will that conduce to his harm and suffering for a long time?" Those listening to him responded, "Yes, Lord."[61] We find this same sentiment in the chapter titled, "Craving," in *The Dhammapada*: "The craving of a person who lives negligently spreads like a creeping vine. Such a person leaps ever onward, like a monkey seeking fruit in the forest. Sorrow grows . . . for anyone overcome by this miserable craving and clinging to the world . . . the person of wrong views is carried away on the currents of lustful intent. . . . Let go of the past, let go of the future, let go of the present. Gone beyond becoming, with the mind released in every way."[62] As author Matthew Bortolin says, "Greed is not itself 'bad' because some authority says so, or because of some moral decree in some doctrine. Greed is 'bad' because it is based on a wrong view of the self."[63] It is also based on the discrimination and separation between one person and another, which in itself stems from ignorance, because, as the Buddha taught, everything in the universe is not independent but interdependent.

In *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*, Qui-Gon says to Anakin something about mind that's particularly Buddhist: "Remember. Your focus determines your reality." This means that if one is greedy, selfish, vengeful, or lustful, one's thoughts will produce actions that follow. This also means that if a person believes that the world is unfair and everyone is "against him," whether this is true or not, this is how that person will perceive the world. Suzuki, too, said that nothing comes from outside the mind: "When you think something comes from outside, it means only that something appears in your mind . . . you yourself make the waves of your mind."[64] One final, particularly Buddhist moment comes in *Empire Strikes Back*, when Luke tells Yoda that he will try, and Yoda responds that he must "do or do not. There is no try." This sounds very similar to what Suzuki says: "Even though it is impossible, we have to do it because our true nature wants us to. Whether it is possible or not is not the point. We do it."[65]

To say that everything taught to a Jedi comes from Buddhism is misleading. One can also see a great deal of Daoism in the films beginning with

Yoda, who resembles what Daoists refer to as an immortal or a perfected being. These individuals possess unshakable equanimity in all situations; they don't hasten after gain, don't take pride in their achievements, don't worry about their ventures, and don't despair in failure. "They are calm and uninvolved, yet take action in just the way that is best for any given situation . . . they are compassionate and understanding, compliant and gentle, helpful and upright. They seem to do the most outstanding feats with ease and no particular effort, full in control of themselves."[66] These sages create harmony, become models for others, are humble, and are a "free passageway for the cosmic energy of the Dao to flow from the root of creation to the benefit of all."[67] To get a sense of Yoda's sage-like personality, one only needs to watch him in the first three episodes, particularly in *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. For instance, no matter how bad a situation seems to get, he always remains clear-minded and calm, choosing to meditate on a problem rather than rushing to action. This is the very principle of *wu wei*. But non-action doesn't mean doing nothing; it means to cultivate the mind, which is to cultivate the Dao. As it is said, "the more he remains in non-action, the more the Dao that is concentrated in him can freely radiate and thereby create harmony and openness for all."[68]

It is said that immortals prefer to live far from the world, withdrawing into the mountains or living in caves. Yoda, who lives in a cave-like dwelling, seems to be the only humanoid on Dagobah. According to Daoism, immortals are masters of the rain, the fire, and the wind, like the *wu* sorcerers, and can pass through fire without burning and through water without getting wet. Several Sith Lords, Jedis who have embraced the Dark Side, can command lightning and "shoot" it from their hands. Examples are Senator Palpatine and Count Dooku. Immortals can "move up on clouds"; they know the future and are masters of time and space. Jedi masters can sense things, knowing of events that might come to pass—often they say that the future is uncertain—and can control the weak-minded. During the famous fight scene between Yoda and Count Dooku, the diminutive Jedi does a variety of flips and turns while flying through the air. In one scene in *Attack of the Clones*, he is shown levitating while sitting in the lotus position. In *Attack of the Clones*, Anakin demonstrates his mental abilities by causing a ball to float in the air. Immortals often have long ears and square pupils. Yoda has long, elfin ears. As healers, immortals practice breathing and gymnastic exercises.[69]

While Yoda is talking about the "Force," he tells Luke that "luminous beings are we, not this crude matter." This is in accordance with Daoism. In the *Taiping Jing Shengjun Bizhia* (*Secret Instructions of the Holy Lord on the Scriptures of Great Peace*), a Daoist text from the second century CE, we read that "human beings originally come from the energy of primordial chaos. This energy brings forth essence, which in turn gives birth to spirit. Spirit

brings forth light. People are also based on the energy of yin and yang. As this energy revolves it brings forth essence. Essence in turn revolves and becomes spirit. Spirit revolves and light is born."[70] The commentary to another Daoist text, *The Xuanzhu Xinjing Zhu* (*Mysterious Pearly Mirror of the Mind*), which dates to the ninth century, explains that attaining "The Prime of the One" is a rather lengthy process. One must be "firm even in hardship and live in solitary serenity. As one darkens the mind and refines the body, naturally the spirit becomes more intense and the body more open. Eventually bones and flesh are blended with the dark mystery; they transform to pure primordiality. Shaking off the old body like a cicada sheds its skin, you can be in several places at the same time." Eventually, with enough practice, one's mind becomes "merged with the Cosmic Chaos, free from the body of the self." As it explains further, eventually one can simply erase one's trace on earth, leaving behind "a staff instead of a corpse."[71] When one is still an ordinary body or mind, a person is limited; when one sheds the body, one can leave being and nonbeing and fly all over the void. This sounds remarkably like what happens after Darth Vader strikes down Obi-Wan Kenobi in *A New Hope*. Vader's red lightsaber hits the old Jedi master, and all that's left behind is his cloak and lightsaber. His body has disappeared, but he's still present. We can hear him as he tells Luke to run for the *Millennium Falcon*.

Many of the films' lines could be understood from a Taoist perspective. Everyone in the *Star Wars* universe had given up on Darth Vader. Even his teacher, Obi-Wan, tried to convince Luke that his father couldn't be saved, saying, "He is more machine now than man; twisted and evil." But Luke won't be dissuaded; even if it means his own life, he will try. This is in accordance with the *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 27, which reads, "Therefore the sage always excels in saving people, and so abandons no one."[72] When Yoda tells Luke to "unlearn what you have learned," we see this reflected in chapter 20 of the *Tao Te Ching*, which reads, "Exterminate learning and there will no longer be worries. Between yea and nay, how much difference is there? Between good and evil, how great the distance?" The section continues with the speaker praising the fact that he has nothing, his heart is foolish; and he is dim, confused, dull, and ignorant: "I alone am muddled, calm like the sea; Like a high wind that never ceases." The author seems to reject all that he has learned, seeing instead the truth that everything is an aspect of the one Dao. This sentiment is also repeated in the writing of Chuang Tzu, who says, "Only when there is no pondering and no cognition will you get to know the Way,"[73] and "Smash up your limbs and body! Drive out your perception and understanding! Cast off your physical form! Get rid of all wisdom! Thus you can join the great pervasion of all!"[74] Zen Buddhism, too, is in accordance. Suzuki wrote that the most important thing is for a person to "forget all gaining ideas, all dualistic ideas. In other

words, just practice zazen. . . . Do not think about anything."[75] He also said that Buddhism shouldn't be about gathering many pieces of information. Instead, one should clear the mind. For when one's mind is clear, "true knowledge is already yours."[76]

Along with restraint and unimportance, compassion is one of the three treasures of Taoism. When Luke is trying to raise his x-wing fighter out of the swamp, he fails, saying, "I can't. It's too big." Yoda chastises him, saying, "Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you?" To illuminate this exchange, we will look at the writings of Chuang Tzu. In chapter 17, the Lord of the River is talking to Jo of the North Sea, and the former asks the latter how we come to have the distinctions of noble and mean, great and small. The latter responds that from the point of view of the Way, things have no nobility or meanness, because each regards itself as noble and other things as mean. He explains that even though we have designations of big, small; useful, not useful; functional, not functional—all of these are dependent on circumstance and perspective. "Embrace the 10,000 things universally—how could there be one you should give special support to? This is called being without bent. When the 10,000 things are unified and equal, then which is short and which is long?"[77] In essence, people get caught up in distinction, when all is really one. Yoda demonstrates that it doesn't take a large person to move the x-wing fighter, because it isn't about physical strength, it's about mental clarity and "strength." Once Yoda has done what Luke couldn't, he exclaims, "I can't believe it." To this Yoda responds, "This is why you fail." Buddhism can shed light on this later statement. As Suzuki says, "A mind full of preconceived ideas, subjective intentions or habits isn't open to things as they are."[78]

Finally, let us return to this prophecy that the "chosen one will bring balance to the Force." Daoism teaches us that everything in the universe is composed of either yin or yang forces; dark and light; wet and dry; passive and active; feminine and masculine. Even though these seem incompatible, for one to exist, we must have the other. "There is neither pure brightness nor pure darkness; neither pure good nor pure evil; neither pure yin nor pure yang." These elements stand for the contradicting and opposing elements that contain, supplement, and balance each other.[79] All processes are marked by change, making it inevitable that at one time yin will predominate and then yang will; however, the goal of human beings is to seek a harmonious balance between the two. Sleep (yin) should be balanced by wakefulness (yang); salty foods (yin) by bitter ones (yang). If one overpowers the other, then on a physical level, sickness and death can result.[80] In the *Star Wars* universe, it's possible that the Sith, which is more active, is represented by yang; and the Jedi, which is more passive, is represented by yin. When yang is predominant, states are organized, power is distributed among rulers and their aides, armies go to war, and soldiers kill each other.

NOTES

1. Stan Guthrie, "Dick Staub on the *Star Wars* Myth," *Christianity Today*, May 2005, http://ctlibrary.com/34605.

2. Luke, could, of course, simply be a variant of George Lucas's own last name.

3. Unlike the Pauline letters, which actually bear this author's name, the Gospels are anonymous. Even though the ancient church attributed the third Gospel to Luke, most modern commentators are skeptical about the validity of this attribution. See the entry, "Luke, The Gospel According to," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 469–74.

4. In early drafts, the sixteen-year-old main character of *Star Wars* was named Annikin Starkiller. His father was named Kane and his ten-year-old brother was named Deak. From Laurent Bouzereau, *Star Wars: The Annotated Screenplays* (New York: Del Rey, 1997), 7.

5. The responder, named Shiva, posted on August 16, 2007, at http://deshika.wordpress.com/2007/08/15/sanskrit-and-the-matrix.

6. See the entry Dakini in *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), 50.

7. John Myrdhin Reynolds, *Wisdom Dakinis, Passionate and Wrathful*, http://www.vajranatha.com/teaching/Dakinis.htm. Interestingly enough, in *The Journey of Luke Skywalker: An Analysis of Modern Myth and Symbol*, Steven A. Galipeau, Jungian analyst, discusses the development of the *anima* and *animus*, especially with regard to Luke Skywalker's quest for the self (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

8. From *Star Wars: Databank*, http://www.starwars.com/databank/updates/401/character/eloradanan. In this script, Lucas recycles some of his ideas from *Star Wars* and commingles Eastern and Western mythology. When Queen Baymorda hears about a child who will unite the kingdom, she orders her guards to capture all pregnant women. (Sounds like King Herod's edict to kill all firstborn sons.) Saved by a midwife, the infant Elora is put on a makeshift raft and sent down a river. Willow and his family find the baby and take her in. When brought before the "High Aldwin," Elora is seen to have great potential; however, he isn't able to hear her "voice" through the Force. Willow is ordered to take her to find another guardian. At the end of the film, the young girl, now a princess, is surrounded by the "Dark Side." Elora's being sent down a river and discovered seems to echo the story of Moses; however, this motif can also be found in the story of Sargon, who was a long-reining Akkadian king.

9. Bouzereau, *Star Wars: The Annotated Screenplays*, 6.

10. *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. W. J. Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11–12. Buddhism and Hinduism have much in common when it comes to being mindful. The primary difference is the object of focus. For Hindus, and especially in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna is told to meditate on Krishna, who reveals himself to be the supreme Lord. In Buddhism, one may meditate on a mantra, an object, light, and such. For the most part, Buddhism, particularly Theravada, is non-theistic. Gods exist but aren't the object of devotion because they, too, are stuck in samsara.

11. Lucas has repeatedly said that Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (1958) was a strong influence. The story is about a princess who escapes an enemy clan

with her commander. They are assisted by two "bumbling" farmers. See Bouzereau, *Star Wars: The Annotated Screenplays*, 9.

12. Steven J. Rosen, *Yoda and Yoga*, on Beliefnet, http://www.beliefnet.com/story/166/story_16672_1.html. The author equates Hanuman with Chewbacca, who is also ape-like.

13. See http://www.beliefnet.com/story/166/story_16672_2.html.

14. *Bhagavad Gita*, 67–68.

15. Under the entry for Yoda at Wookieepedia.com, the author states that the name may also be connected to the Hebrew *yodea*, which means "he knows" or "one who knows." See http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Yoda.

16. Jan Knappert, *Indian Mythology* (London: Diamond Books, 1995), 69.

17. Trisha Biggar, *Dressing a Galaxy: The Costumes of Star Wars* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005), 36.

18. See the Jidai Geki entry at http://kungfucinema.com/categories/jidaigeki.htm. Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp's *The Midnight Eye Guide to New Japanese Film* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2005) also mentions several *jidai geki* films.

19. Stephen F. Teiser, "The Spirits of Chinese Religion," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 32.

20. From the Qigong Institute's website, http://www.qigonginstitute.org/main_page/main_page.php.

21. When all of the words in his name are translated, with *mundi* being Latin for world, it reads something like "first breath of the world."

22. Mary Henderson, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1997), 189.

23. Does the name for the planet Kamino, home of the Kaminoans, refer to kimono or is it just a play on the Chevy El Camino? Lucas, after all, had a penchant for cars when he was a teenager and even paid homage to classic cars in his 1973 film *American Graffiti*.

24. *Code of the Samurai: A Modern Translation of the Bushido Shoshinshu of Taira Shigesuke*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1999), 11.

25. *Code of the Samurai*, xv.

26. The seven folds in a samurai's *hakama*, skirt-like pants, are said to be symbolic of *yuki*, valor; *jin*, benevolence; *gi*, righteousness; *rei*, civility; *makoto*, honesty; *chugi*, fidelity; and *meiyo*, dignity.

27. David West Reynolds, *Star Wars Episode I: The Visual Dictionary* (New York: DK Publishing, 1999), 8.

28. Vivien Sung, *Five-Fold Happiness: Chinese Concepts of Luck, Prosperity, Longevity, Happiness and Wealth* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002), 94–95.

29. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 291.

30. See chapter 2 titled "Introduction and Early Development: Han Dynasty" in Kenneth Ch'en's *Buddhism in China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 21–53.

31. *Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, 82.

32. This is obviously another reference to the Vedic tradition, with the Vedas being the sacred "revealed" texts of the Aryans.

33. For more explanation about the costumes, see Biggar, *Dressing a Galaxy*. To see the costumes online go to *Dressing a Galaxy: The Costumes of Star Wars from the*

FIDM Museum & Galleries, http://starwars.fidm.edu/introduction/welcome.shtm?section=introduction&subsection=startwelcome and especially *The Padawan's Guide to Star Wars Costumes*, http://www.padawansguide.com.

34. Biggar, *Dressing a Galaxy*, 13.
35. Biggar, *Dressing a Galaxy*, 35.
36. Henderson, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, 189.
37. Biggar, *Dressing a Galaxy*, 9.
38. J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars* (New York: Del Ray, 2007), 69.
39. Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 98.
40. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars*, 87. The author also claims that when writing the initial treatment for what would become *Star Wars*, Lucas used a sort of stream-of-consciousness approach to coming up with many of the character and place names. In fact, on page 172, a sidebar titled "Musical Names" discusses many of the characters. For instance, for Obi-Wan Kenobi, he writes "I picked Ben because it was a very easy name; Kenobi was a combination of a lot of words I put together. The name came out of thin air."
41. See the entry on the Queen at http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Apailana.
42. It's fitting that the Jedi Order has its headquarters on Coruscant, which means "shining" and "glittering."
43. Dave Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* (New York: Harmony Books, 1983), 20.
44. Pollock, *Skywalking*, 20. One website claims that Lucas lists his religion as "Buddhist Methodist," and that his friend, Gary Kurtz, introduced him to Eastern religions. See http://www.adherents.com/people/pl/George_Lucas.html.
45. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars*, 18.
46. Michael Kaminski, *Adventures in Filmmaking: The Secret History of Star Wars* (Kingston, Ontario: Legacy Books Press, 2008), 21.
47. *The Dhammapada*, trans. Gil Fronsdal (Boston: Shambhala, 2005), 63.
48. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, ed. Trudy Dixon (New York: Weatherhill, 1972), 25–26.
49. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 40.
50. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (London: Penguin Classics, 1963), 24.
51. Henderson, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, 68.
52. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 30.
53. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 39.
54. Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 67.
55. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 241.
56. Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 133.
57. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 58.
58. Apparently Irvin Kershner, the director of *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*, has Buddhist leanings and wanted to give Yoda and the scenes on Dagobah more of a Zen feel.
59. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 21.
60. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 90.

61. *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Anguttara Nikaya*, trans. and ed. Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikku Bodhi (London: Altamira, 1999), 65.
62. *The Dhammapada*, 87–91.
63. Matthew Bortolin, *The Dharma of Star Wars* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 113.
64. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 30–31.
65. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 41–42.
66. Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*, 279.
67. Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*, 280.
68. Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*, 280.
69. Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, 49.
70. Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*, 194.
71. Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*, 216–17.
72. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 32.
73. *Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 234.
74. Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*, 218.
75. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 45.
76. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 80.
77. *Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 182.
78. Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 90.
79. Hsiao-Lan Hu and William Cully Allen, *Taoism* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005), 30–31.
80. Stephen F. Teiser, "The Spirits of Chinese Religion," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 33–34.

4

May the Force Be with Jew

The Jedi-Hebraic Connection

Andrew Bank

> "Do . . . or do not. There is no try!"—said the little green rabbi, Yoda, teaching Luke Skywalker to levitate his x-wing star fighter from a bog.

This *The Empire Strikes Back* moment was filmed before the advancement of computer generated imagery, so it was Frank Oz pulling Yoda's strings. Still, these profound words indicate that something else was guiding the Jedi's sermon. Luke would slowly come to understand the complex, invisible spirit that also directed the words and actions of Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader, the evil Emperor Palpatine, and others in our favorite galaxy far, far away. We know this universal cosmic Master simply as "the Force."

The Force? What is It? Is It merely a fiction that was dreamed up in the ingenious mind of George Lucas? Or is It something more?

If there *is* such a Force, must we be a Luke Skywalker to master It? Must we have an all-knowing Yoda to set us on the path toward proficiency? Do we have to come from a superior lineage, like Anakin Skywalker or Christ (both of whom were born from a virgin mother), or, can we, mere ordinary earthlings, sequestered away in our own little galaxy, also learn Its Ways?

Learning the Ways of the Force is indeed possible, because the Force is not just a possibility, but is, in fact, an actuality. It has been known to all the world's great and noble faiths for millennia. As in the timeless *Star Wars* epic, the Force was, at one time, spiritual knowledge possessed by only a few enlightened teachers and their chosen disciples. But, in this particular era, because it is a different era, where spiritual illumination is becoming more common (and even democratic), the Ways of the Force have left their monkish seclusion and entered the bright light of popular culture.

The Ways of the Force may be taught in different languages from the one Yoda used—and some translating may be necessary for those who come from different planets, cultures, and spiritual/religious perspectives. Nevertheless, the Ways of the Force do not change from one sector of the cosmos to another. If you want to learn them, it is helpful to analyze the Force based on how It compares to more prominent theologies.

I am no Yoda (I humbly admit I am more of a religious Padawan), but I am interested in exploring how belief in the Force relates to religion and spirituality. Specifically, I'm intrigued by how lessons from the *Star Wars* galaxy can relate to Jews hailing from the enduring, unifying, and spiritual power-breeding planet of "Israel."

While I doubt most Jews would follow in the footsteps of over 70,000 Australians and recognize "Jedi Knight" as an actual faith, I do believe we possess many fundamental values shared by our beloved lightsaber-wielding heroes. Jews and Jedis can learn a lot from one another, and I'll do my very best to explain how.

In his fascinating essay "The Power of Mythmaking/May the Tao Be with You: The Myth, Religion, and *Star Wars*," Kevin J. Wetmore asserts that people relate George Lucas's epic space opera to "stories in the Bible, in the Koran, and in the Torah."[1]

The Torah, the principal source of Judaic legal and ethical code, is believed to have been orally passed down from God to the prophetic leader Moses on the sacred Mount Sinai in 1312 BCE. Forty years later, Moses transcribed the Torah and shared all of the laws with elders who became responsible for conveying its messages to the rest of the Jews.

The Torah has been called an "instruction manual for life," and there are undoubtedly connections between how one applies its teachings and those of the Force. We first must recognize that neither is easy to understand fully. Neither can be neatly (and effectively) taught to oneself, as it takes time and *help* to incorporate their important lessons into our lives. We all begin at square one, where we begin to discover the truths that will captivate us throughout times of discovery.

In both Judaism and "Jedi-ism," age plays a significant role in how we follow the guiding lifestyle codes. Observers of both faiths believe devout observation and "training" should begin early in life. Young Jews spend years learning values and traditions before reaching the Bar Mitzvah age of thirteen-year-old boys (girls reach traditional Bat Mitzvah age at twelve). This important celebration acknowledges maturity and "publicly marks the assumption of that obligation, along with the corresponding right to take part in leading religious services."[2]

Jedi training begins in infancy, and aging can be *detrimental* to one's success in the rigorous development process. In *Episode I—The Phantom Menace*, Yoda tells Qui-Gon Jinn that Anakin, at ten years old, is too mature to

begin his training process. Because Jedi training requires complete sacrifice and withdrawal from a more normal path of living, a complicated past can taint an individual forever. Yoda and the Jedi Council's original assertion is well-intended, but Qui-Gon's stubbornness (and Obi-Wan's loyalty to his master) ultimately lead to the unconventional training of the boy who would one day become the most feared Sith in the galaxy. Anakin's painful childhood experiences never truly left him, justifying Yoda's initial concerns. A clear, unaltered mind is essential with taking up the Force. This isn't necessarily the case with Judaism, as one's true Jewish life commences after years of free thought and growth. Mentors play crucial roles in an individual's studying of both Judaism and the Force. For young Jews, parents are heavy influences on the way we learn to see, interpret, and act. According to Jewish law, honoring parents is a duty. In *Leviticus* (19:1–3), there is written "requirement to show reverence" to one's elders.[3] Jews believe that obeying this commandment will help earn the reward of a longer and more prosperous life from God. Avoiding disputes and contradictory actions can help children demonstrate admiration and respect toward their parents, and they expect to receive love and Torah instruction in return.

Rabbis also have special relationships with those observing Judaism. Whether by making themselves available for personal consultation, or delivering an insightful, congregational sermon based on a Torah portion, Jewish scholars can profoundly shape followers (of all ages) during times of personal growth. Rabbis can also provide us with the deep historical context many Jews do not fully understand, as they often thrive at creatively relating the past to current events. This underscores their importance as Jewish ambassadors linking tradition and ancient stories with the issues affecting all of us today. Jedi masters, like Yoda and Mace Windu, do the same for those in *Star Wars*.

To become an ordained rabbi, reform rabbis undergo a formal admissions process, Hebrew language and history education, a minimum of one year spent in Israel, and several ceremonies.[4] The rigorous requirements bestow the rabbis' credibility and the opportunity to demonstrate a steadfast commitment to their faith. Other rabbis have a mentor (or "master") who guides them on their educational path. This was more common in first-century Judaism, and it created relationships similar to Obi-Wan and Anakin's.

In the *Star Wars* universe, Jedi life is a perpetual cycle, as the curious students one day become skilled and experienced instructors of wisdom. They *earn* the ability to lead over time. Fans of the series can best watch this unfold through the eyes of Obi-Wan, as the noble hero applies Qui-Gon's teachings and later influences both Anakin (tragically) and Luke (more successfully). Without meeting Obi-Wan, Luke would never have left his unfulfilling life on the barren Tatooine. He certainly wouldn't have learned how to command his senses and destroy the Death Star!

While Jews may not actually have living, 900-year-old mentors like Yoda, the passion for sharing tradition and knowledge to younger followers has helped keep the religion alive for generations. At the end of the original trilogy, we are excited to see that Luke and Leia will help the Jedi way continue. Rabbis communicate Jewish values in hopes of inspiring others to keep the faith strong and widespread.

According to writer Gary Roenblatt, the *Star Wars* films convey important, Jewish messages about friendship. In a 1999 *J Weekly* column entitled "New *Star Wars* Film Underscores Values of Judaism," Roenblatt asserts, "Here we are reminded of the Torah's commandment: 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' the core of Jewish belief."[5] He cites George Lucas's belief that we all have "obligations to your fellow man, to other people that are around you."[6]

In the visionary filmmaker's story, we see many characters learn this valuable lesson, including Han Solo. Solo's moral transformation reflects core Judaic principles. Harrison Ford's "space cowboy" famously shifts from an arrogant renegade into a selfless advocate of Luke, Leia, and the rebellion. His last name, once symbolic of his solitude and nihilism, takes new meaning when he learns to embrace something much larger than himself. His "better her than me" attitude toward Leia vanishes as Han eventually becomes her lover and *general*. While Solo isn't a Jedi, his personal redemption directly coincides with his growing understanding and respect of the Force. If Solo can learn to appreciate the Ways of the Force—why can't we?

Roenblatt also brings up the important concept of *evil* and how it fits in with *Star Wars* and Judaic life. He writes, "Perhaps most importantly, the underlying message in the *Star Wars* films is a simple yet profoundly Jewish one: We all have to choose between good and evil. Relativism may be popular in American culture. . . . But it's a luxury the *Star Wars* characters cannot afford to retreat toward; they must choose sides and act, and they do."[7]

By creating a polarizing spirituality with opposite Light and Dark Sides, George Lucas makes this clear. The prequel trilogy is fueled by the audience's knowledge that Anakin will be corrupted and pulled from goodness to evil. The original, on the other hand, gives us the more conventionally structured story of Luke triumphing over similar temptations. The two trilogies beautifully illustrate the delicate line between good and evil, and how individual choices can dictate what side you will be on.

Roenblatt adds, "We can't all be Luke Skywalkers, saving the universe from evil and destruction, but Lucas is reminding us we can all be heroes, doing our own small part to make this world a better place."[8] In *Star Wars* and Jewish life, commitment to positive values can lead to perseverance. Just as the light side of the Force helps the rebels prevail over the evil empire, Jews have clung to their faith and values while surmounting tragic obstacles like slavery in Egypt and the Holocaust. In this respect, both Lucas

and the Torah show us that we must first recognize the existence of good and evil before we can embrace our free will and choose a team.

One of the fundamental qualities associated with evil in both *Star Wars* and Judaism is *greed.* Lust for power, best demonstrated by Emperor Palpatine, is at the core of the Dark Side. It is loathed by the Jedi, and equally by rabbis, who hold that putting others ahead of yourself (or in their words, being a "mensch") brings you closer to God. George Lucas once said, "The issue of greed, of getting things and owning things and having things and not being able to let go of things . . . is the opposite of compassion—of not thinking of yourself all the time."[9]

In *Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin loses his way after demonstrating an unhealthy desire to control *everything*. Han Solo does a better job recognizing that selflessness can bring more happiness than any reward or individual power ever can. By learning to love others, Han finds his true purpose. Anakin let his greed stand in the way of his *true* love (Padmé), driving him toward an abyss. These two characters are paragons for how embracing or avoiding greed can exert drastic forces on our relationships and fate.

The Force is more powerful than any individual who can harness It. Although Judaism and the Force can be applied personally, neither lends itself to sole ownership. You may have power of God (or the Force) in you, but you yourself are never God.

In *Star Wars*, Jedi and Sith lords come and go. Audiences barely have time to get to know Darth Maul, Qui-Gon Jinn, and Count Dooku before they die and other heroes and villains replace them. The spirit binding (and separating) them, though, never disappears. In fact, the Force continues to linger in a Jedi long after his physical death. Soon after Darth Vader strikes down Obi-Wan in *A New Hope*, Ben begins posthumously guiding Luke. Obi-Wan knew he would become "more powerful" in death, explaining that belief in an afterlife comes with the Force.

This is very different from Jewish teachings, where there is a tendency to emphasize one's earthly life (in the Hasidic Movement, having posthumous spiritual teachers is common, though). While *Genesis* 17:14 suggests "the wicked are cut-off from their people," there isn't a unified Jewish perspective about what happens after death.[10] This varies from other religions like Christianity and Islam, where people are encouraged to live virtuously for the rewards of a blissful afterlife.

While religion and spirituality can bring large groups of people together, it can also be very *personal.* In *Return of the Jedi*, Obi-Wan says, "Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view." This is one of the most meaningful lines in the *Star Wars* saga, as it makes us question our own perspectives in relation to larger ideas. Judaism encourages followers to do the same. Jewish families choose whether they want to observe Reform, Conservative, or more Orthodox

teachings. For example, even though Reform Jews believe the Torah did *not* directly come from God, they are *still* Jewish. This principle also correlates with Jedi, as some are more conservative (Yoda) than others (Qui-Gon). Ultimately, the Force and Judaism can both help people think and reason, but the real power to interpret and act is in our hands.

In *Star Wars*, skeptics refer to the Force as an "ancient religion." Ironically, the film series' modern-day relevance proves this untrue. The most successful commercial endeavor in cinematic history will continue to affect our world and our culture, philosophy, mythology, and spirituality. At an early age, I knew plenty about Chewbacca, Jabba the Hut, and Lando Calrissian *before* I learned about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As I've grown up, I've learned to appreciate both sets of figures in my own ways.

So what do we do when our personal x-wing gets submerged in a murky swamp? What do we do when no amount of effort can help us accomplish our goals? When all seems lost, how can we go about salvaging hope? Millions of people have their own unique answers, but most of us share a common belief that there is something or someone out there to guide us along our own hero's path. The Force isn't for everyone, as patience, concentration, and humility are needed to manifest Its powers. But isn't this the case with any faith? Learning to cooperate with It—being the Force, or whatever you believe in—isn't just for your betterment, but also for the betterment of all people and all creatures. If spiritual harmony were easily attainable, wouldn't we all have peace of mind?

Sadly, the world is not, in a Force-like way, light and dark. There are ambiguities, mysteries, and miracles that cause us to question ourselves, our beliefs, and others on a daily basis. Faith, regardless of how *religious* it may be, can help fill in the grey areas, while providing us with context to evaluate where we stand and where we want to go. It helps us cope with change, loss, vulnerability, and uncertainty. Faith can also make the brighter moments more spellbinding, and remind us of how much we have to appreciate.

Yoda is right. There truly is no *try*. In particularly difficult times, we have an obligation to *do* what is right and strive to be the best people we can be. "Doing" often requires a leap of faith. *Star Wars* demonstrates that a person often has to leave one's comforts behind in order to embrace our true calling. Judaism, and all religions, encourage us to do the same.

While I was raised Jewish, I'm not particularly invested in my religion. I do, however, believe that spirituality is positive and essential for the future of humankind. In life, we all have our own Emperors to defeat. We all have our Vaders to redeem, Leias to rescue, and apprentices to take under our respective wings. Having strong values can help us prepare for our quests, in this galaxy or any other.

NOTES

1. Kevin J. Wetmore, "The Power of Mythmaking/May the Tao Be with You," in *Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion and Rebellion in the Star Wars Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 80.
2. "Jewish Law," accessed December 14, 2010, http://www.torah.org/learning/jewishlaw.php3.
3. "Jewish Parent/Child Relationships," accessed December 14, 2010, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Relationships/Parents_and_Children.shtml.
4. Barry Dov Lerner, "How to Become a Rabbi," accessed December 14, 2010, http://judaism.about.com/library/3_askrabbi_c/bl_rabbi.htm.
5. Gary Roenblatt, "New *Star Wars* Film Underscores Values of Judaism," *J Weekly*, May 28, 1999, http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/10871/new-star-wars-film-underscores-values-of-judaism.
6. Roenblatt, "New *Star Wars* Film."
7. Roenblatt, "New *Star Wars* Film."
8. Roenblatt, "New *Star Wars* Film."
9. Roenblatt, "New *Star Wars* Film."
10. "Jewish Beliefs on the Afterlife," accessed December 14, 2010, http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/beliefs/afterlife.htm.

5

Star Wars

An Exhibition in Cold War Politics

Nick Desloge

In the 1970s, the Cold War stalemate between democracy and communism had escalated into Vietnam. Richard Nixon resigned from office, and an economic crisis spurred by oil prices raised the unemployment rate to 9 percent in May of 1975. The public was scared of what could happen and needed a leader. George Lucas, director of *Star Wars*, saw these societal issues as a reason to give the public new hope—a modern-day fairy tale that would provide excitement and the security of the conservative, wholesome 1950s era set in the future. While popularly known to reference several film genres, including science fiction, samurai, Western, and even Arthurian myth, we can actually see *Star Wars* as a political movie as it reflects several historical aspects of the Cold War and eventually dictates the future direction of the war itself.

The term "cold war," initially coined by Don Juan Manuel when referring to the conflict between Christianity and Islam, noted the differences between a "cold war" and a "hot war." "War that is very fierce and very hot ends either with death or peace, whereas a cold war neither brings peace nor confers honour on those who wage it."[1] So while there have been many cold wars in history, one jumps out as being the "Cold War" that we know. The Cold War referenced in this essay is between the United States and the Soviet Union, begun after World War II and ended officially in 1991. The Cold War was about geopolitical tensions with no thought of peace in sight. This, of course, was the case until the Soviet economic and political model failed and the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991 after the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus signed the Belavezha Accords. After the accords, the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War officially ended.

While there was virtually no physical fighting between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War, the threat of nuclear annihilation, proxy wars, and the political situation surrounding the war sparked many similarities that are replicated in the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

Espionage, one of the primary tactics of the Cold War, is highly visible in both the Cold War and *Star Wars*. In the Cold War, both sides dove heavily into espionage. One example of the Soviet Union's spies included Klaus Fuchs, an atomic spy who passed information about the atomic bomb from the United States to the USSR. However, the most prominent example within the Soviet Union would likely be *Active Measures*, which was a group of Soviet security services that conducted political warfare. Their work included falsifying John F. Kennedy assassination theories, spreading information about U.S. scientists manufacturing AIDS, and perpetrating rumors that the FBI director was a homosexual.[2] On the other side of the world, the United States was gathering its own intelligence. The 1960 U-2 incident, where a U-2 spy plane shot down over Soviet Union airspace provides an example of one failed espionage mission among many attempts. Further, the Venona project, a collaboration of U.S. and UK intelligence agencies that attempted to encrypt messages sent across the Atlantic Ocean, demonstrates how integrated espionage had been within the Cold War.

In *Star Wars*, espionage serves an enormous role, furthering the plot from the very beginning. In *A New Hope*, as the Empire captures the rebel ship, Princess Leia uploads stolen plans for the Death Star to R2-D2 before her capture. Along with the plans is an encrypted message, intended only for Obi-Wan Kenobi, which Luke Skywalker intercepts. Once Luke discovers the hologram, he becomes an important piece of an intergalactic war. However, he only decides to join the rebel cause because of a physical attraction to Leia and to escape a desolate life caused by the Empire's destruction of his family's farm; of course, stormtroopers had done so only to track down stolen information. Later in *A New Hope* the rebels use the stolen plans to destroy the Death Star, reducing the Empire substantially, thus taking a large step forward for the rebel forces.[3] Later in the trilogy, rebel spies uncovered plans of a second Death Star protected by shields supplied by a nearby moon. Unfortunately, Emperor Palpatine, a leader of the Empire who "leaked the information," did not expose that Empire forces heavily guarded the moon, a common spy tactic used to mislead the enemy. As a result, rebel forces initially fail to destroy the Death Star. It was only after Han, Leia, and Chewbacca heroically destroy the shield generator on the moon that the second Death Star was vulnerable to attack.[4] Through use of spy tactics by both the rebels and the Empire, *Star Wars* successfully mimicked one of the telltale pieces of the Cold War.

Another way in which *Star Wars* mimics the Cold War is the use of surrogates. Typically surrogates are states that are "satellites" of conflicting

nations that were used by both sides in the Cold War. In the case of the United States, one could argue that any member state in NATO would be a satellite of the United States, including France, the United Kingdom, or Canada. One could argue that the Soviet Union's satellites include any other communist nation in the world, such as Cuba, North Korea, Venezuela, and North Vietnam. While some of these countries defected from the Soviet Union, others, like Cuba, proved to be pivotal in the Cold War. Another prominent example of a satellite state is Israel. Initially Israel received support from both the United States and the Soviet Union, with both abstaining from the passage of Security Council Resolution 95. Both recognized Israel within three days of Israel declaring independence. However, Soviet support of Israel quickly deteriorated as it emerged as a close Western ally. Because the Soviet Union was a secular state, relations with a religious Western state became strained and the Soviets realigned their strategic interests toward Arab regimes in the Middle East.

In *The Empire Strikes Back*, satellite states are reflected through another key plot twist in the Cloud City, initially an autonomous city-state. Han Solo and Princess Leia flee following a battle on the icy planet of Hoth. Because it was such a small operation, the Cloud City managed to remain "under the radar" of the Empire and could be independent. Unfortunately, after arriving, Lando Calrissian, the Baron Administrator, made a deal with Darth Vader to ensure the colony's continued economic autonomy. In exchange, Lando promised to aid the Empire in taking his old friend prisoner, as well as luring Luke Skywalker to the city in a rescue effort. Calrissian eventually betrayed Vader in order to let his citizens flee and eventually left with Leia and Chewbacca, playing a key role in the rescue of Luke after his duel with Vader. Through the key political shifts of power, support, and autonomy, Cloud City functions much like a surrogate in the Cold War.[5] The use of satellite states in *Star Wars* managed to mimic another tactic within the Cold War.

Another large development within the Cold War was the use of a weapon of mass destruction—the nuclear missile. Developed during World War II and used twice by the United States, the nuclear missile was considered the ultimate weapon of destruction. The "doomsday device" was the source of great fear for the world, which explained why both sides tried to relieve political tensions to ensure mutual deterrence of nuclear weapons; failing would cause mutual destruction. The event that exemplifies the fear of the weapon of mass destruction was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. During this incident, Cuban and Soviet governments began building bases in Cuba that would house medium-range ballistic nuclear missiles, capable of striking almost all of the continental United States. Generally regarded as the moment that the Cold War came closest to nuclear conflict, both sides made demands that the other wouldn't agree upon. Eventually, each power

agreed to a secret pact that deactivated missiles deployed in Europe by the United States in 1962.[6]

The general fear of a weapon of mass destruction is reflected in other films of the time, ranging from *Excalibur*, where a legendary sword brandished by a boy was used to control an entire kingdom,[7] or a more realistic black comedy, *Dr. Strangelove*, which depicted the end of the world through a nuclear "doomsday device."[8] Another film that adopts the theme is *Star Wars: A New Hope*, in which the Death Star, widely regarded as a weapon of mass destruction, actually has that fear realized with the destruction of Alderaan. In a demonstration of power, the Empire obliterated Alderaan despite its being a peaceful planet.[9] This scene is indicative of the fears of most people during the Cuban Missile Crisis—that people had almost no influence over the fate of the world. Understandably, the true fear throughout most of *A New Hope* doesn't necessarily lie with Darth Vader directly—it is more the Death Star, as this machine has the most potential for destruction. In the Cold War and *Star Wars*, the individual who controlled the warhead was less important than the power of the actual weapon. If there could be one distinguishing object within the original *Star Wars* trilogy, many would argue for the Death Star, just as many people would argue that the most important object in the Cold War was nuclear weapons, as both have the potential for massive destruction and create fear that permeated their respective worlds.

Another specific example of *Star Wars*' reflection of the Cold War is the Berlin Blockade. Set just after the end of World War II, one of the first major international crises of the Cold War actually caused a few casualties. The issue arose when the defeated Germany was divided into "East" and "West," east being occupied by the Soviet Union and west by the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. What was left, however, was Berlin. Berlin was divided in half, with the Soviet Union occupying the eastern half and the allies occupying the western half. The Soviet Union set the blockade in motion by restricting railway and road access to West Berlin, in an effort to force western powers to allow Soviets to support the western half of Berlin with food and fuel. This, in effect, would give the Soviets practical control over the city. As a response, the allies organized an airlift to carry supplies to the people in West Berlin. Eventually the Soviets, embarrassed over their unsuccessful coup, ended the blockade in the spring of 1949.

The significant blockade in the battle of Hoth in the original trilogy resembles the Berlin Blockade. Hoth, an icy planet, was a hideout and base for the rebellion. After the Empire discovers it, their Star Destroyers arrived in the planet's orbit. The beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back* includes a battle scene of AT-AT walkers attempting to destroy the planetary shield and capture key individuals in the rebellion—Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa, and Han Solo. While the Rogue Squadron defended the base admirably,

the power generator was destroyed, ruining the planetary shield. However, several Rebel transports managed to evade the Empire's blockade, including Luke's x-wing fighter and the *Millennium Falcon*, which held Han Solo, Princess Leia, the two droids, and Chewbacca.[10] While the battle was a major victory for the Empire, Darth Vader failed in his ultimate goal of capturing Luke Skywalker. The similarities between the two blockades primarily reside in the method that subverted the blockade itself: flight. While the Soviet forces blocked road and rail, the allies flew supplies to the people of West Berlin. Similarly, the rebels managed to maneuver between the blockade set by the Empire through flight, carrying essential cargo—their military leaders. Both blockades end in relative failure as neither blockade entirely worked. The Soviets and the Empire were embarrassed at their ineptness to accomplish their basic task—capturing the opposition's strategic resources.

Toward the end of the Cold War and the *Star Wars* saga, events were set in a desolate desert-like environment. During the Cold War, the Soviets attempted to invade Afghanistan, a tribal country in Central Asia. The initial Soviet deployment began in Afghanistan in December 1979 and continued until February 1989. The invasion occurred during a civil war in which the communist party was fighting with the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. The communists in Afghanistan asked for the aid of the Soviet Union while the anticommunist rebels received support from the United States. The Soviet occupation failed in spreading communism throughout Afghanistan; instead it caused a nationalistic movement, further promoting a rebellion. During the early 1980s, the Soviets attempted to secure the country, but almost 80 percent of Afghanistan's territory was outside the officials' control.[11] The resistance eventually won out with the support of the United States, and the Soviet Union retreated, leaving behind a country with little national direction, completely engulfed in chaos.

This symbolic failure of the will of the Soviet Union is visible in the 1983 *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of The Jedi* on the desert planet of Tatooine. In the beginning sequence, Jabba the Hutt holds Han Solo captive. When Luke arrives, he attempts to get Jabba to release Solo, but is unexpectedly cast into the Rancor pit to battle for his life. After surviving this spectacle, Luke, Han, and Chewbacca are then subject to a public execution.[12] Leia, dressed in chains of slavery, kills Jabba the Hutt; this represents the deadly consequences that occurred when the Soviet military attempted to control too much of the tribal Afghanistan. Also shown is the general mayhem that our heroes leave on Tatooine—without any leader, a power vacuum is created that could lead to stability issues on Tatooine, echoing the course of events in Afghanistan. On Tatooine, the planet is largely controlled by the Hutts, space gangsters who don't have an allegiance to any motive except their own. Those who are part of the tribal system in Afghanistan also didn't necessarily have an allegiance to either communism or democracy; rather,

they were simply involved in a proxy war between two world powers.[13] It would follow appropriately then that the thorn in the Empire's side initially came from Tatooine—Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope*. Both locations eventually have their infrastructures destroyed due to the proxy fighting, as exemplified through the explosion of Jabba the Hutt's ship. The Soviet Union's mission in this Central Asian country was largely reflected by the sequence shot in *Return of the Jedi*.

All of these similarities within *Star Wars* gave the viewer a better understanding and visual analysis of events that transpired during the Cold War, but what really ties this war to *Star Wars* is how the movie trilogy actually dictated the direction of the Cold War in the 1980s. The biggest example of this is the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), known commonly as "*Star Wars*," which would serve as a major nuclear deterrent from the mid-1980s until the end of the Cold War.

The story of *Star Wars* premiered amidst a backdrop of political issues stemming from the Cold War. Lucas, the creator of *Star Wars*, was a "Hollywood liberal," who had clearly indicated in interviews that while *Star Wars* was intended for younger audiences, its political undercurrents were critical of the Republican Party in America. Specifically, he criticizes Ronald Reagan's abuse of governmental power.[14] Further, Peter Krämer argues that "George Lucas . . . had actually written the part of the Evil Emperor with Reagan's Republican predecessor Richard Nixon in mind."[15]

Unfortunately for Lucas, *Star Wars* was seen as a "myth of our time" or a "fairy tale" without seriously considering the general public's view on political undercurrents. Most viewers didn't see the events in *Star Wars* as symbolic of the plight of the United States during the Cold War.

Ronald Reagan harnessed *Star Wars* at the peak of its popularity in theaters of May 1982 with the release of a home video and its first television appearance in February 1983. This piqued the public's interest for the series' second sequel, *Return of the Jedi*, that May. His missile defense system required funding, so Reagan delivered a *Star Wars*–inspired speech in March 1983 asking for American support of the defense budget he submitted to Congress. He deftly explained that "the Soviets . . . have enough accurate and powerful nuclear weapons to destroy virtually all of our missiles on the ground," and expressed his vision of a missile defense system as "moving toward our ultimate goal of eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles."[16] The speech was controversial to begin with as he was proposing a huge budget increase, but Reagan made his case at a time when "*Star Wars* films had popularized the notion of space-based weapons systems." He also included the line, "a new hope for our children in the twenty-first century," an oblique reference to *Star Wars* that would encourage a "space-aged" response.[17]

Reasonably, Edward Kennedy, a senator from Massachusetts, responded by drawing comparisons to the movie *Star Wars* in an effort to point out the

romanticized nature of Reagan's missile defense program, even going so far as to accuse Reagan of "misleading Red Scare tactics and reckless *Star Wars* schemes."[18] Despite the critical intentions of the comments, supporters of the missile defense system saw the label of "*Star Wars*" as "evocative and ambivalent" and immediately embraced the term.[19] Soon the term raced through the American public, and despite enormous costs that would normally prevent a project of this magnitude, the Strategic Defense Initiative went into place in 1984.

Reagan also capitalized on the popularity of *Star Wars* when he used the term "Evil Empire" in speeches. In his "Evil Empire" speech in March 1984, Reagan characterized communism as a totalitarian ideology in which morality is entirely subordinate to the interests of class war and that "while military strength is important . . . the real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith."[20] Reagan then went on to "rhetorically name the Soviet Union the 'Evil Empire.'"[21] This helped draw even more comparisons in the public's eye as referenced by "a cartoon in the *Indianapolis News* [that] portrayed the Soviet missile defense program as a huge Death Star dwarfing a spaceship representing SDI."[22]

The speech may have even affected the public's perception of *Star Wars*. In a 1986 poll, half of the respondents saw "the Empire" as evil, "whereas 24 percent saw it representing right-wing dictators and 12 percent saw it representing Communism."[23] People chose to use *Star Wars* terms in political debates, often ignoring the meanings that specifically attached to the terms in the films, and drawing from the original "associations of the film's title . . . people began to employ terms from the movie in discussions of technological and military issues."[24] It seems that despite Lucas's original intentions, the public had a shift in paradigms due to the speeches of Ronald Reagan, severely altering the course of action in the Cold War. Lucas was so upset about the use of terms coined in his creation that in 1985, he sued advocacy groups that campaigned for the Strategic Defense Initiative who used the "*Star Wars*" label. In the short run, the Republican side won out, successfully completing the SDI, and helping to bring about the end of the Cold War. After twenty-five years, however, few people associate *Star Wars* as a tool that Ronald Reagan leveraged for political gain.

Star Wars has continued to be an incredibly popular film, drawing on several genres to achieve its longevity. During analysis of the movie, *Star Wars* was regarded as a Western, sci-fi, samurai, Arthurian myth, but few have seen it as a political film series, which is partly what George Lucas had intended. It is likely that Lucas made the new trilogy so political that people could recognize the original series as a piece of political work. *Star Wars* was and always will be a "movie of movies," but based on the period of its production, its striking similarities with some of the real-life events, and the way it was leveraged by politicians in its time, *Star Wars* should also be

considered the political film that not only relived the Cold War but ended up changing the course of that war as well.

NOTES

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6

Fighting the Evil Empire

Star Wars, the Strategic Defense Initiative, and the Politics of Science Fiction

Peter Krämer

When the special edition of *Star Wars* premiered in January 1997, the press book produced by the film's distributor, 20th Century Fox, and many of the articles and reviews appearing in newspapers and magazines at that time highlighted the film's centrality for contemporary American popular culture.[1] Pointing out that our mass media contain numerous references to the film and that many words and phrases from it have entered into everyday language, the promotional pamphlet proclaimed that "while *Star Wars* was a defining event for one generation, it has been embraced by new generations, assuring its place as a timeless epic of grand design and boundless fun."[2] *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *New Yorker*, and the *New York Times* concurred by stating that the film was "part of the culture" and its "lessons" about good and evil, humanity and technology, hubris and redemption, and tradition and innovation were "a very powerful force indeed."[3] While some of these publications mentioned in passing the *Star Wars* term "evil empire" and its appropriation by Ronald Reagan, none pointed out that for several years in the mid-1980s the film's title had been identified with the former president's missile defense program. When other publications did discuss this connection, they tended to reproduce the incorrect but widely held assumption that Reagan himself had attached the term "Star Wars" to what is officially the Strategic Defense Initiative.[4] With popular memory so unreliable, it is an important task to reconstruct the origins of Reagan's missile defense initiative and its association with *Star Wars*.

In a televised speech on March 23, 1983, President Reagan asked the American public to support the defense budget he had submitted to Congress.[5] To gain such backing, he spoke of "years of neglect and mistakes" under previous administrations, about the key principle of military strategy

in the nuclear age ("deterrence of aggression through the promise of retaliation"), and about the dramatically increased military power of the Soviet Union. This power, he claimed, undermined the ability of the United States to guarantee retaliation and thus maintain deterrence, because "the Soviets . . . have enough accurate and powerful nuclear weapons to destroy virtually all of our missiles on the ground." In response to this threat, Reagan called for a continuation of the "major modernization program" of conventional and nuclear forces that he had initiated after taking office in January 1981. Reagan vehemently rejected the proposals for a "nuclear freeze," that "would reward the Soviets for their massive military buildup while preventing us from modernizing our ageing and increasingly vulnerable forces." Instead, he proposed future negotiations about "arms reduction" conducted from a position of military strength.

To this point, all appeared predictable from a president known as an old Cold Warrior. Surprisingly, Reagan then framed the main body of his speech with an exciting outlook on a way in which to implement an alternative to the very principle of deterrence. At the beginning of his presentation, the president promised to reveal "a decision which offers a new hope for our children in the 21st century" and, at the end, he shared his "vision of the future" with the audience: "It is that we embark on a mission to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive. . . . What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest on the threat of instant US retaliation to deter a Soviet attack; that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?" Reagan acknowledged that "this is a formidable technical task" that "will take years, probably decades, of effort on many fronts." Yet while at present his proposal might appear mere fiction, it was fiction firmly based on the current state, the past achievements, and the future possibilities of science.

Reagan "call[ed] upon the scientific community who gave us nuclear weapons to turn their great talents to the cause of mankind and world peace; to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete." As "an important first step," the president initiated "a long-term research and development program to begin to achieve our ultimate goal of eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles." Reagan's science-fiction vision of missile defense turned this address into one of the most controversial and, arguably, one of the most influential presidential speeches of the 1980s. Some political analysts go so far as to claim that by dramatically raising the stakes in the military competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, Reagan's missile defense program paved the way for the success of later arms reduction talks, and even perhaps for the eventual exhaustion of the Soviet economy, thus hurrying along the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.[6]

In any case, the cultural currency and political efficacy of Reagan's vision derived to a considerable extent from its association with George Lucas's 1977 science-fiction fairy tale *Star Wars*.

In fact, it was Senator Edward Kennedy who famously attached the "Star Wars" label to Reagan's vision in comments made on the floor of the Senate the day after the speech, accusing the president of "misleading Red Scare tactics and reckless Star Wars schemes."[7] Kennedy's comments were meant to highlight the irresponsibly fantastic nature of Reagan's missile defense program and the real dangers both of his Cold War rhetoric and his escalation of the arms race into space (although Reagan did not mention space weapons in his speech, it was widely understood they would be the cornerstone of missile defense). Yet despite Kennedy's critical intentions, the "Star Wars" label proved so evocative and ambivalent that some of Reagan's supporters immediately embraced it.[8] Henceforth, his missile defense program, which did not acquire its official—and rather uninspiring—title Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) until the spring of 1984 was universally known as "Star Wars."[9]

This convergence of politics and science fiction, reality and fantasy, Washington and Hollywood raises a number of intriguing questions: Where did Reagan's vision of a future missile defense system originate? Why did he decide to insert this vision into his speech on March 23, 1983? Why were political commentators so eager to attach the "Star Wars" label to his vision? What were the political meanings that *Star Wars*, the movie, had acquired by the early 1980s? Which of those meanings were mobilized in the debate about Reagan's missile defense program?

It is generally agreed that Reagan had a highly personal investment in the missile defense program he initiated in March 1983 and that he circumvented normal advisory and speech-writing procedures to include it in his address to the nation. In his psycho-biographical study of "the making of Ronald Reagan in 1940s Hollywood," Michael Rogin traces Reagan's vision of missile defense back to the 1940 Warner Brothers movie *Murder in the Air*, in which Reagan's character prevents a foreign spy from stealing the plans for a powerful new defensive weapon, the so-called inertia projector. By being able to stop and destroy any attacking vehicle or missile, the projector would, according to one of the film's characters, "make America invincible in war and therefore be the greatest force for peace ever invented." Rogin's central thesis is that the future president "found out who he was through the roles he played on film."

It is not only that Reagan extensively referred to movies in his later speeches, quoting, for example, Clint Eastwood's famous line, "Go ahead, make my day" from one of the *Dirty Harry* movies in Congress with reference to his promised veto to tax increases, or stating in July 1985 after American hostages held in Lebanon had been released: "Boy, I saw *Rambo*

last night. . . . Now I know what to do next time this happens." More worryingly, Rogin argues that the president's essential identity and his conception of reality had been shaped by Hollywood fictions, without him even being aware of it or able to step outside the fictions he had once inhabited. Thus, Reagan's announcement of a missile defense program in March 1983 raised a troubling question for Rogin: "Are we now being ruled by the fantasies of a 1940s countersubversive B movie?"[10]

In sharp contrast to this kind of psychological critique, military historian Donald Baucom's exhaustive study *The Origins of SDI* shows that, far from being a Hollywood fantasy, Reagan's vision of missile defense was in fact very much in line with an important strand in U.S. strategic thinking since World War II. Soon after the German launch of the first V-2 ballistic missile against London in September 1944, the American military initiated a research and development program to develop defenses against future missile attacks on the United States.[11] Baucom traces the difficulties of this program through subsequent decades, noting that the principle of nuclear deterrence in the 1960s and 1970s (appropriately known as MAD, for Mutual Assured Destruction) gradually displaced the notion of effective missile defense.

In the late 1970s, interest in strategic defense systems reemerged in certain scientific, military, and political circles, now placing a strong emphasis on space-based laser weapons. Even before Reagan became president, these circles exerted a strong influence on him, partly because, according to Baucom, Reagan had already developed "a strong dislike for the concept of offense-based nuclear deterrence" and was genuinely concerned about the vulnerability of the United States in the event of a nuclear attack.[12] An oft-quoted incident, which focused Reagan's mind on this problem, was his visit to the North American Air Defense Command center in the summer of 1979. Here, a demonstration of the center's tracking and display facilities showed Reagan "the simulated tracks of missile warheads appear[ing] at the top of the display screen and progress[ing] rapidly toward theoretical targets in the United States"—without the mighty American military being able to stop them.[13] Confronted with this terrifying image, Reagan became interested in the development of a missile defense system.

In the early 1980s, Reagan was also influenced by increasing religious opposition to the principle of nuclear deterrence. In October 1981, for example, twenty Catholic bishops declared that it was immoral to possess nuclear weapons, and for May 1983 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops announced the publication of a document on war and peace expected to reinforce this declaration.[14] Karsten Zimmermann has argued that the forthcoming pastoral letter was an important element in the serious political crisis, which Reagan encountered at the end of 1982 and the beginning of 1983. Public support for Reagan's defense policy, in particular his massive military buildup, was eroding rapidly during this

time. Closely connected to religious opposition, a broadly based nuclear freeze movement emerged that demanded an end to the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons, and culminated in the success of freeze proposals in several state referenda. Furthermore, following the 1981–1982 recession and its attendant rise in unemployment, Reagan's popularity reached a low point. With a record budget deficit of $200 billion and inevitable cuts in social programs, Reagan's budget for the fiscal year 1983–1984, which was submitted on January 31, 1983, and included a 10 percent increase in defense spending, met with strong opposition in Congress. This forced the president to postpone budget deliberations there and to appeal directly to the American public in his speech on March 23. At the same time, there were enormous difficulties with the basing of the new MX intercontinental missiles; the military could not deploy one of the most advanced American weapons systems, which undermined the retaliatory capabilities of the United States and further encouraged the president to think about alternatives to nuclear deterrence.[15]

In the context of this political crisis, Reagan's remarks on missile defense in his address to the nation made eminent political sense. In response to criticism of nuclear deterrence and military spending, Reagan redefined American defense strategy, offering hope for a nonnuclear future that could be achieved only through enormous investments in military research.[16] Reagan's vision also was a rhetorical masterstroke, worthy of the man known as the "Great Communicator."[17] His vision offered what was an otherwise oftentimes negative speech about American decline and the increasing Soviet threat an optimistic spin, dramatically setting up a heroic task for the American people while expressing confidence that, as always, they would rise to the occasion, thus "changing the course of human history." Secondly, Reagan simplified complex political issues and brought them down to a level that the average person would perceive as common sense. He asked, "Would it not be better to save lives than to avenge them? . . . [I]s it not worth every investment necessary to free the world from the threat of nuclear war?"[18]

By phrasing it this way, Reagan made it difficult for the American people to answer "No." And they didn't: Numerous opinion polls taken after the speech showed overwhelming support (around 70–80 percent) for Reagan's missile defense program; this included many Democrats.[19] However, it is worth pointing out that with his speech Reagan did not actually push against established public opinion but was finely attuned to it. Opinion polls taken a few months *before* the speech had indicated that while most Americans were unaware of the fact that the United States had no defense against missile attacks, once they were told, they stood strongly in favor of developing a missile defense system.[20] Thus in his address to the nation, Reagan only told the American people what

he already knew they wanted to hear. And he did so at a time when the *Star Wars* movies had popularized the notion of space-based weapons systems and military combat.

As for the film itself, soon after its release in May 1977 the original *Star Wars* had quickly become the highest grossing movie of all time at the American box office.[21] Its release had been accompanied by an unprecedented merchandising craze that would eventually gross billions of dollars. The film was successfully rereleased in the summers of 1978 and 1979, before its sequel *The Empire Strikes Back* came out in May 1980, quickly earning the status of second highest grossing film of all time. This success was followed by further rereleases of the first film in 1981 and 1982, and by the successful launch of the *Star Wars* video in May 1982 and the film's first appearance on pay-TV in February 1983. This further whet public appetite for the forthcoming release of the second sequel *Return of the Jedi* in May 1983. Clearly, then, when Reagan addressed the nation on March 23, 1983, "Star Wars" was on everybody's mind.

In truth, the film seems to have been very much on Reagan's mind throughout the month of March, as is evidenced by one of his most notorious speeches. On March 8, the president addressed the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals.[22] In this speech, Reagan spoke in support of "a great spiritual awakening in America, a renewal of the traditional values that have been the bedrock of America's goodness and greatness." While acknowledging that "[o]ur nation, too, has a legacy of evil," he celebrated America's "capacity for transcending the moral evils of our past." In sharp contrast, he characterized communism as a totalitarian ideology in which "[m]orality is entirely subordinate to the interests of class war," leaving no place for God or religion. Because of this, he declared the Soviet Union to be "the focus of evil in the modern world," which must be contained through military strength. Reagan urged his audience not "to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, [not] to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil." He argued that "[w]hile military strength is important, . . . [t]he real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith." In the end, the Soviet Union would be brought down by "faith in God and the freedom He enjoins."

The phrase "evil empire" encapsulates Reagan's controversial application of religious categories to the political and military rivalry between the two superpowers. The *Star Wars* films had, of course, been popularized by such a concept. Throughout his political career, Reagan had frequently and self-consciously used movie references in his speeches. In this case, apparently, Reagan and his speechwriter did not actually intend to refer to *Star Wars* but felt that the phrase "evil empire" would prove powerful in its own right.[23]

However, the press and the public were aware of the terms associated with *Star Wars* and consequently more inclined to see Reagan's future speeches through the prism of this most popular of Hollywood movies. This helps to explain why, two weeks after the "evil empire" speech, people tried to make sense, or nonsense, of Reagan's announcement of his missile defense program with reference to "*Star Wars*." The fact that Reagan slipped an oblique reference to the film into his speech might have further encouraged such a response. When Reagan referred to "a new hope for our children in the 21st century," he quoted, probably inadvertently, the subtitle of the first *Star Wars* film, which is "*A New Hope*."

Arguably, the extreme popularity of a Hollywood film such as *Star Wars* derives not so much from any fixed message it seemed to convey or any specific response it aims to provoke, but from the multiplicity of meanings extracted from it, as well as from the multiple uses to which we can put it. Referring to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" or labeling Reagan's missile defense program "Star Wars" provides us with two such uses. These may mobilize any of the meanings previously attached to the film or the term, and may add new meanings to the existing repertory.

In order to explore this repertory, it is useful first to take a close look at the film's title. During the marketing research for *Star Wars* in the year before its release, that title had been tested to ascertain the perceptions of the upcoming film that those two simple words conveyed to potential moviegoers. According to Olen J. Earnest, researchers found that "[b]y itself the title generated little interest in seeing the film. The predominant theme conveyed by the title was that of a science fiction film centering on some kind of conflict in outer space." This resulted in a "generally unfavorable and violent impression of the film, primarily among female moviegoers," but the film's title did appeal to a limited audience of "primarily young moviegoers, ages 25 and under." A concept test, which asked respondents to judge a brief description of the film, revealed that due to its science-fiction label they identified the film with "space hardware and destructive technology . . . inhuman aliens and robots," thus lacking a human dimension, which again only appealed to young males. To overcome the resistance of older and female audiences, the advertising campaign developed as a result of these tests aimed to highlight the film's epic scope and its echoes of classic mythology, as well as the centrality of its human characters. The primary focus would be the young knight Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia. This campaign established *Star Wars* as a science-fiction fairy tale, a futuristic myth, a space fantasy; hence the tag line: "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . ." The film's appeal was thus opened up beyond the core sci-fi audience of young males to reach all sections of the cinema-going public; each of these audience sections was encouraged to see something different in the film.[24]

As to any political meanings in the film, it may be useful to consider the introductory text that scrolls across the screen at the beginning:

> It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, Rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to the Empire's ultimate weapon, the Death Star, an armored space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet.

Any political reading of this scenario would obviously depend to a large extent on who or what is identified as the real-life equivalent of the rebel heroes and the Evil Empire. While no research on audience responses from the late 1970s and early 1980s exists, a poll conducted by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner in 1986 gives an indication of the basic principles underpinning people's attempts to perceive the film as one with political significance. According to this poll, about half of all respondents saw the Empire abstractly, "as an embodiment of 'evil,' as opposed to 24% who saw it representing right-wing dictators or 12% who saw it representing communism." While most people understood the rebel heroes to represent "the 'underdog' in a struggle against 'big institutions' or 'imperialism' or 'dictators,'" their real-life equivalents, as identified by respondents, ranged from the heroes of the American revolution and any group of people fighting for "freedom of thought and self-determination" in the face of tyranny (which included leftist revolutionaries in contemporary central America) to conservative so-called freedom fighters. Finally, when asked whether "the movie is in favor of the conservative idea of 'peace through military strength,'" conservative respondents overwhelmingly responded yes, whereas the majority of moderate and liberal respondents replied no.[25]

This poll suggests, then, that audiences were not only willing to attach political meanings to this science-fiction fairy tale but did so according to their own political beliefs, drawing on both historical precedents and current events. *Star Wars* achieved its popularity partly by allowing everyone to extract from it precisely the political meaning they were most comfortable with.[26] In order to understand how these manifold meanings of *Star Wars* were mobilized in the debate about Reagan's missile defense program, it is important to note that terms taken from the movie, such as its title, had been used as a shorthand in public debates about various issues well before March 1983. These early employments tended to detach the chosen term from the film's story, carrying over some of its associations into other fields while ignoring most of the meanings the term denoted in the context of the original. Arguably, the film's story demonstrates the primacy of the spiritual power of "the Force" over the technological power of space weapons, that is, the primacy of metaphysics over physics (which, in fact, is very much in line with Reagan's beliefs as expressed in his "Evil Empire" speech).

Such philosophical sentiments could easily be utilized in conversations and speeches by quoting key lines from the film's dialogue such as: "May the Force Be with you!" or "Trust the Force!" However, despite its apparent critique of a predominantly scientific and technological worldview, the film itself was celebrated as a marvelously overwhelming display of the achievements of special effects technology, which was put to its most impressive use in the space battle sequences. Drawing on the original associations of the film's title, therefore, people began to employ terms associated with the movie in discussions of technological and military issues. When the idea of missile defense was revived in military, scientific, and political circles in the late 1970s, one of the key proposals was to set up space stations that would be equipped with laser weapons able to shoot down missiles launched against the United States. When this proposal was first introduced in an article in the technical journal *Aviation Week* in October 1978, the author called this space-based weapons system a "battle station"—which was, of course, the very term used in *Star Wars* for the Evil Empire's Death Star.[27] While George Lucas's Death Star had been an offensive weapon employed by the bad guys, in terms of its superior technology and its status as the "ultimate weapon," it did indeed seem to be a somewhat exaggerated, futuristic equivalent of what the American military was actually developing at the time.

Perhaps supporters of this research program felt that it would profit from its association with the movie, despite this association inverting the moral judgments of technology forwarded in the movie. At any rate, when the missile defense schemes of the U.S. military gained wider circulation beyond specialist circles in the early 1980s, commentators in the general press immediately criticized them with reference to the movie in articles entitled "No Need for Star Wars" or "Make Way, Please, for Star Wars."[28] These articles from 1980 and 1982 prefigured the rhetorical intervention made by Edward Kennedy on the floor of the Senate on the day after Reagan's speech of March 23, 1983: Missile defense systems were disqualified as a dangerous science-fiction fantasy, which would never become a reality but might do considerable damage in the process of being developed.[29]

Edward Linenthal's cultural analysis of the responses to Reagan's speech and of subsequent debates about the Strategic Defense Initiative shows that *Star Wars* references continued to be used very effectively by Reagan's opponents to undermine his credibility as a politician and military strategist. In various political cartoons, for example, Reagan is associated with *Star Wars* characters to indicate his inability to distinguish between Hollywood fantasy and political reality. In a cartoon in the *Oregonian*, his "Star Wars" scheme is presented by one Dr. Yoda; in the *San Diego Union*, Reagan is shown at his desk making a televised speech on "space-age defense" while surrounded by, as he says, "a crack team of experts to advise us" that includes C-3PO

and R2-D2, the two robots from *Star Wars*, as well as E.T. from the popular Steven Spielberg film. The *Boston Globe* pictured Reagan posing with a sword in a Darth Vader costume in front of his wife Nancy, telling her: "And then I'd yell to Andropov: 'Lasers at dawn, you commie fink.'" He is also shown in the same costume in bed, looking at a picture book about war, while Nancy sighs: "Really, Ronny, sometimes I honestly think there's more to life than Star Wars and a Soviet arms buildup."[30] These last two cartoons not only implied that Reagan was living in a childish fantasy world, but also identified him with the force of evil in the Manichaean moralistic universe of the *Star Wars* movie. This further implied that, should it ever be made to work, Reagan's space-based defense system would likely be used, like the Evil Empire's Death Star, for offensive purposes, which might eventually lead to the destruction of the whole planet (as it does in *Star Wars*, in which several billion people are killed).[31]

However, in line with the differing political readings of the original movie, *Star Wars* references could also *support* the Strategic Defense Initiative. A cartoon in the *Indianapolis News*, for example, portrayed the Soviet missile defense program as a huge Death Star dwarfing a tiny spaceship that represented SDI, while the *Dayton Daily News* portrayed Andrei Gromyko as Darth Vader.[32] Furthermore, conservative spokesperson Phyllis Schlafly welcomed the identification of SDI with *Star Wars* because, like the movie, Reagan's vision was a "drama of the battle between good and evil, and of the triumphs of good over evil through adventure, courage and confrontation."[33] These comments show how, at least in retrospect, Reagan's announcement of his missile defense program connected intimately to the "evil empire" speech he had given two weeks earlier. Whatever positive response the launch of the Strategic Defense Initiative elicited was largely dependent on this connection. In the minds of his supporters, the technological and strategic vision Reagan presented in the "Star Wars" speech was ultimately justified by the moral vision he had outlined in the "evil empire" address. Like the popularity of the movie, the cultural impact of Reagan's two-part vision in March 1983 derived from its successful combination of spectacular technology and profound spirituality.

In conclusion, opponents of missile defense programs originally introduced the "Star Wars" label in the early 1980s to ridicule the proposed research and development schemes as well as to signify them as unworthy of serious consideration. Yet, by the mid-1980s it was generally acknowledged that the association of Reagan's SDI with *Star Wars* worked in its favor.[34] Reagan himself had ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, he disliked the emphasis on large-scale war that the film reference brought to his initiative. Yet on the other, he acknowledged the compatibility of the film's spirituality and moral vision with his own worldview. Thus, in comments made in March 1985, Reagan first rejected the "Star Wars" label by saying that "[the

Strategic Defense Initiative] isn't about war. It is about peace." But then he added: "If you will pardon my stealing a film line—the Force is with us."[35]

The fact that the president drew this line directly from *Star Wars* and numerous SDI supporters used the term "Star Wars" and other references to the movie in their publicity and advertising campaigns distressed *Star Wars* creator Lucas, a typical Hollywood liberal, who had actually written the part of the Evil Emperor with Reagan's Republican predecessor Richard Nixon in mind.[36] In the midst of a flurry of TV commercials dealing with SDI, in 1985 Lucas finally decided to fight back against the political establishment and brought suit against two advocacy groups campaigning for SDI, intending to forbid them the use of the "Star Wars" label. However, in November 1985 U.S. District Judge Gerhard Gesell ruled that anyone could use the term "Star Wars" in "parody or descriptively to further a communication of their views on SDI."[37] As far as Lucas was concerned, the Dark Side of the Force seemed to have won. But it did not prevail: Just over eleven years later, the Strategic Defense Initiative was no longer a matter of intense public debate. And the surprisingly successful rerelease of *Star Wars* took place without any unpleasant echoes of Reagan's program whether we choose to refer to it in retrospect as SDI or, as many people still prefer, "Star Wars."[38]

NOTES

1. A good selection of publicity material and articles can be found in the production file and press clippings folders for *Star Wars: Special Edition* in the Margaret Herrick library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

2. Ibid.

3. Bruce Hardy, "The Force Is Back," *Time*, February 10, 1997, 69–74; David A. Kaplan, "The Force Is Still with Us," *Newsweek*, January 20, 1997, 52–56; John Seabrock, "Why Is the Force Still with Us?," *New Yorker*, January 6, 1997, 40–53; *New York Times*, January 31, 1997, C16.

4. See, for example, "Why Star Wars?" *Interview*, April 1997; "'Star' Lore & Trivia," *Weekend Press-Telegram*, January 31, 1993.

5. Reprinted in Alun Chalfont, *Star Wars: Suicide or Survival?* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), 139–51. For a detailed analysis of the speech, see Janice Hocker Rushing, "Ronald Reagan's 'Star Wars' Address: Mythic Containment of Technical Reasoning," *Quarterly Review of Speech* 72 (November 1986): 415–33. Cp. G. Simon Harak, "One Nation, Under God: The Soteriology of SDI," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 497–527.

6. A positive evaluation of Reagan's foreign policy toward the Soviet Union in general, and of the impact of the Strategic Defense Initiative in particular is offered by, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), ch. 7; and, most enthusiastically, by Patrick Glynn, *Closing Pandora's Box: Arms Races, Arms Control, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books,

1992), ch. 10. For a more balanced evaluation see, for example, Michael Schaller, *Reckoning with Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), chs. 5–6; and Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994), ch. 16. For more recent discussions see, for example, Frances FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Nigel Hey, *The Star Wars Enigma: Behind the Scenes of the Cold War Race for Missile Defense* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006); Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2008); and Peter J. Westwick, "The Strategic Offense Initiative? The Soviets and Star Wars," *Physics Today*, June 2008, 43–49.

7. Kennedy's intervention was reported in "Glossary: '*Star Wars*,'" *Boston Globe*, January 21, 1985, 18, as quoted in Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Symbolic Defense: The Cultural Significance of the Strategic Defense Initiative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 14–15, 126. According to John Sims, Kennedy in turn referred to newspaper headlines that had compared Reagan's missile defense program to *Star Wars*; see Sims's letter to the editor in *History Today* (May 1999): 58.

8. For example, in an article titled "Star War Reality," published in the *Wall Street Journal* two days after the speech (March 25, 1983, quoted in Linenthal, *Symbolic Defense*, 12, 125).

9. Linenthal, *Symbolic Defense*, 126.

10. Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), ch. 1, quotations from pp.1, 3, 7. For an extensive discussion of *Murder in the Air*, see Stephen Vaughn, *Ronald Reagan in Hollywood: Movies and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ch. 6.

11. Donald R. Baucom, *The Origins of SDI, 1944–1983* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 1–6. Herbert F. York, "'Star Wars': Origins and Overview," in *The Arms Race in the Era of Star Wars*, ed. David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf (London: Macmillan, 1988), 213–31; and Hey, *The Star Wars Enigma*, chs. 1–6.

12. Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 130.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 186.

15. Karsten Zimmermann, "Decision in March: The Genesis of the 'Star Wars' Speech and the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)," in *The Reagan Administration: A Reconstruction of American Strength?*, ed. Helga Haftendorn and Jakob Schissler (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 149–51. See Reagan's own account in *Ronald Reagan, An American Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), chs. 70–73.

16. For a discussion of the actual investment in, and the viability of, the missile defense program see, for example, Keith B. Payne, *Strategic Defense: "Star Wars" in Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton, 1986), ch. 2, esp. 24–25.

17. Studies of Reagan's speeches and rhetoric such as Paul D. Erickson, *Reagan Speaks: The Making of an American Myth* (New York: New York University Press, 1985); William K. Muir Jr., "Ronald Reagan: The Primacy of Rhetoric," in *Leadership in the Modern Presidency*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 260–95; Werner Schmidt, "Ronald Reagan and His Rhetoric in Foreign Policy," in Haftendorn and Schissler, *Reagan Administration*, 77–88. See also Robert

Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), ch. 5, and Garry Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents Abroad* (London: Heinemann, 1988), ch. 38.

18. From a speech reproduced in Chalfont, *Star Wars: Suicide or Survival?* 149–51.

19. Poll results listed in Payne, *Strategic Defense*, 236–47. Thomas W. Graham and Bernard M. Kramer, "The Polls: ABM and Star Wars: Attitudes toward Nuclear Defense, 1945–1985," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 125–34. For European responses see Christopher T. Husbands, "The Strategic Defence Initiative and British Public Opinion," in *Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons*, ed. Catherine Marsh and Colin Fraser (London: Macmillan, 1989), 57–82.

20. Payne, *Strategic Defense*, 234–35.

21. For information on the original release, subsequent rereleases, sequels, and such, see, for example, Olen J. Earnest, "*Star Wars*: A Case Study in Motion Picture Marketing," in *Current Research in Film*, vol. 1, ed. Bruce Austin (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1985), 1–18; and Thomas Schatz, "The New Hollywood," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 22–25.

22. "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, March 8, 1983," reprinted in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1983, Book 1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 359–64.

23. Reagan's speechwriter Tony Dolan called the term a "semantic infiltration" that had the power to change public perceptions of the Soviet Union. While Reagan had used the notions of "evil" and of a Soviet "empire" before, he combined them in this speech for the first time. See Muir, "Ronald Reagan: The Primacy of Rhetoric," 276–78.

24. Earnest, "*Star Wars*: A Case Study."

25. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 234–35, 303–5, 308.

26. For academic readings of the relationship between the content of *Star Wars* and contemporary American politics, with particular reference to Reagan's speech of March 23, 1983, see, for example, David S. Meyer, "*Star Wars*, 'Star Wars' and American Political Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 99–115; Clyde Taylor, "The Master Text and the Jeddi (sic) Doctrine," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 96–104. Beyond these two texts, there are a huge number of academic interpretations of the *Star Wars* films, which is impossible to reference here.

27. Clarence A. Robinson Jr., "Army Pushes New Weapons Effort," *Aviation Week*, October 16, 1978, quoted in Baucom, *The Origins of SDI*, 118.

28. David Wilson, "No Need for Star Wars," *Mother Jones*, August 1980; and David Wilson, "Make Way, Please, for Star Wars," *Boston Globe*, March 8, 1982, quoted in Linenthal, *Symbolic Defense*, 15, 126.

29. For further uses of terms taken from *Star Wars*, see, for example, William J. Broad, *Star Warriors—The Weaponry of Space: Reagan's Young Scientists* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 104–9; Ronald Brownstein, *The Power and the Glitter: The Hollywood-Washington Connection* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 285.

30. Linenthal, *Symbolic Defense*, cartoons reprinted on 22, 27.

31. Ibid., 80.

32. Ibid., 53, 59.

33. Phyllis Schlafly, "Star Wars and Broken Treaties," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* 18, no. 4, sec. 1 (November 1984), quoted in ibid., 15.

34. Robert Karl Manoff, "Modes of War and Modes of Social Address: The Text of SDI," *Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 59–84, esp. 69–70.

35. Comments reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 30, 1985, quoted in Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, 3; Ronald Reagan, "Strategic Defense Initiative," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 21, no. 11 (March 18, 1985), quoted in Linenthal, *Symbolic Defense*, 15.

36. Dale Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* (Hollywood: Samuel French, 1990), 145.

37. "Judge Upholds Usage of Phrase 'Star Wars,'" *New York Times*, November 27, 1985, quoted in Linenthal, *Symbolic Defense*, 112; Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, 42–43.

38. For overviews of developments in, and debates about, missile defense since the 1990s, see, for example, the following studies, all of which make frequent use of the "*Star Wars*" label: FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 479–99; Loring Wirbel, *Star Wars: US Tools of Space Supremacy* (London: Pluto, 2004); Hey, *The Star Wars Enigma*, ch. 14; Helen Caldicott and Craig Eisendrath, *War in Heaven: The Arms Race in Outer Space* (New York: The New Press, 2007), ch. 3.

7

Lightsabers, Political Arenas, and Marriages for Princess Leia and Queen Amidala

Ray Merlock and Kathy Merlock Jackson

> I've always admired your courage, Harry, but sometimes you can be really thick. You don't really think you're going to be able to find all those Horcruxes by yourself, do you?[1]

The line, spoken by Hermione Granger in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2009) to Harry Potter as Ron Weasley nods in agreement, has the pointed spirit of something Princess Leia Organa might have said to the two young males in her life, Luke Skywalker and Han Solo. Certainly Hermione, Harry, and Ron in the eight Harry Potter movies share similarities with Leia, Luke, and Han in the first three *Star Wars* films—including adventure, a battle against a dark lord, affection (including, for Leia and Han and for Hermione and Ron, finally a spoken love and marriage), and frequent ego clashes. Examining Princess Leia and her mother Padmé Amidala thirty-five years after the first *Stars Wars* release, *Episode IV: A New Hope*, provides insights into two interlocking issues—(1) the characters' historic place and overall importance in the development of female figures in popular culture and cinema, particularly in science-fiction and fantasy movies, and (2) from a feminist perspective their significance as role models or as failed role models.

Leia's stature in science-fiction and fantasy movies, in cinema overall, in popular culture, and within feminist perspectives, extends beyond obvious connections to the characters in Harry Potter. Leia functions as an extension of earlier science-fiction female characters, such as girl-friend-in-danger Dale Arden in *Flash Gordon* and higher-ranking-officer Colonel Wilma Deering in *Buck Rogers*, as well as a new stage in the ongoing presentation of the fairy-tale princess in jeopardy. The evolving (or, in the opinion of some, devolving)

character of Leia in the first three *Star Wars* films also established a framework for the presentation of her mother Queen/Ambassador/Senator Padmé Amidala in the last three *Star Wars* films and set directions for the evaluation via critical feminist perspectives of central female characters within popular film genres. Although partially dismissed and devalued in some scholarly articles, Princess Leia was listed in 2008 by *Empire Magazine* as "the 89th greatest character of all time"[2] and, according to gaming company giant IGN, ranks as "the 8th top *Star Wars* hero."[3] Also, as Will Brooker writes in *Using the Force: Creativity, Community, and Star Wars Fans*, "Women and girls are into *Star Wars*. Online, female-run communities attract thousands of hits per week. The webmistresses of sites like Star Wars Chicks have loved the saga since they were young and found ways to explore it in make-believe games and fiction during their childhood, despite pressure to ditch *Star Wars* and conform to more traditional gender roles."[4] Brooker goes on to examine "the ways in which young female fans managed to negotiate those gender stereotypes to pursue their investment in a 'boy's film'—and the extent to which that negotiation continued when they grew up, yet retained their loyalty to the saga."[5] Interpretation is the key, as evidenced by a conversation between a boy and a girl related by Vivian Gussin Paley in *Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner*: "'Princess Leia is Luke's sister,' Charlotte notes. Andrew rejects the idea. 'Uh-uh. Princess Leia is the boss of the good guys.'"[6]

Indeed, Princess Leia's resourcefulness, wit, dedication to the Republic, and courage mark her as an important ingredient in the initial success of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* in 1977. *Star Wars* can obviously be classified as updated, boy-oriented space opera that blended old-school Saturday-at-the-Bijou serial content with emerging, innovative special-effects options. Yet the well-executed presence of Leia meant the inclusion of a strong female character in the midst of the blossoming feminist movement, a woman who resounded with young and old, female and male moviegoers in different, more upbeat ways than did other 1970s movie females Annie Hall, Nurse Ratched, Adrian from *Rocky*, Joanna Kramer from *Kramer vs. Kramer*, or, from television, the women of *Charlie's Angels*, *Wonder Woman*, *The Bionic Woman*, *Three's Company*, or *All in the Family*.

Diana Dominguez, in an article titled "Feminism and the Force: Empowerment and Disillusionment in a Galaxy Far, Far Away," writes about the uninspiring portrayals of females in the movies and television shows of her youth, followed by her enthusiastic reaction when, at the age of seventeen, she first laid eyes on Leia:

> But, in May 1977, finally, I saw, larger than life, on the screen the woman I wanted to become. Here was a woman who could play like and with the boys, but who didn't have to become one of the boys and who could, if and when she wanted to, show she liked the boys, a woman who is outspoken, unashamed,

> and, most importantly, unpunished for being so. She also isn't a flirty sex-pot, tossing her hair around seductively to distract the enemy. . . . She doesn't play the role of the "maternal caretaker," although she does display caring and compassion, or "the sweet innocent damsel" who stands passively by while the men do all the work, but does step aside to let them do what they're good at when it is wise to do so. She isn't a freak with special powers, like Jamie, "The Bionic Woman" (1976–78) or Diana Prince, "Wonder Woman" (1975–79), who could then be "excused" from being a "real" woman but who must still "hide" that she is a "girl" so she'd be accepted—she just IS. Leia is a hero without losing her gendered status; she does not have to play the cute, helpless sex kitten or become sexless and androgynous to get what she wants. She can be strong, sassy, outspoken, bossy, and bitchy, and still be respected and seen as feminine.[7]

Certainly, in the thirty-five years since the release of *Star Wars* in 1977, Princess Leia Organa has stirred up controversy, representing varying, sometimes contradictory qualities to different people. She has been described as "a driven, dedicated woman with a forceful—if somewhat abrasive—personality" who, like her mother, was "active and successful in the political arena, as well as the most beautiful and remembered woman in the *Star Wars* universe."[8] Also she represented a Woman Warrior before Ripley of *Alien* and before television's *Xena, Warrior Princess*, one who takes part in combat operations, who is accurate and deadly with a blaster, shooting down various stormtroopers, and who, with her own hands using her chain of bondage, strangles to death the gangster and abductor Jabba the Hut.

As for her appearance, Leia introduced the rather questionable fashion statement of the "doughnut or cinnamon buns hairdo." Director George Lucas's inspiration for the look was supposedly the "Squash Blossom" hairstyle of young marriageable Hopi Indians, corn maidens who symbolized both fertility and wisdom and who served as "soldaderas" in Pancho Villa's army.[9] After the release of *Return of the Jedi*, Leia (and Carrie Fisher, the actress who portrayed her) became a generational sex symbol with a pin-up poster and/or cardboard standee connected to the iconic slave-girl costume her captor Jabba required she wear. The metal string bikini consisted of a patterned copper top with a curved, plunging neckline that fastened behind the neck and back with string. The thong bottom had copper plates at the groin in front and back partially covered by a red silk loincloth. Leia wore high leather boots and topped off the ensemble with a hair fastener that positioned her braided ponytail to cascade over her right shoulder, two bracelets, a snake arm-wrap, and a chain and collar that bound her to Jabba and that she used to end his/its life. Leia's mother Amidala shares several of Leia's contrasting images and personas—political figure, queen, figurehead, policy maker, compromise seeker, diplomat, senator, one with responsibilities to her own people and to diverse factions throughout the galaxy, as well as a woman in love, not necessarily with the most suitable subject.

It proves useful to consider the scenes in which Princess Leia appears throughout the initial *Star Wars* trilogy, accompanied by various critical interpretations. Two of the most interesting analyses of Leia and Amidala appear in "Stop Her, She's Got a Gun! How the Rebel Princess and the Virgin Queen Became Marginalized and Powerless in George Lucas's Fairy Tale" by Jeanne Cavelos and "Feminism and the Force: Empowerment and Disillusionment in a Galaxy Far, Far Away" by Diana Dominguez. Both articles argue that females in the *Star Wars* canon initially appear to have dominance and control but ultimately are disempowered.

In *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977) the iconic opening scroll reads, "Rebel spies managed to steal secret plans. . . . Pursued by sinister agents, Princess Leia races home aboard her starship, custodian of the stolen plans that can save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy."[10] When Vader's larger vessel overtakes her craft, viewers see Leia inserting a card into the droid R2-D2. Stormtrooper forces overwhelm her men, strike her unconscious by a blast, and bring her before Darth Vader. Her first words are "Lord Vader . . . only you could be so bold as to—" only to be interrupted by Vader, who disputes that she is on a diplomatic mission of mercy and denounces her as "part of a rebel alliance and a traitor." Later Vader and some of his underlings come to her cell and demand of her the location of the rebel base. A long needle suggests a mind probe, certainly some sort of torturous intrusion, but Leia remains silent as the door to the cell closes.

Shortly thereafter, Luke sees Leia's image for the first time when R2-D2 projects a hologram of the young woman clad in a white hooded garment of almost biblical design. The fading in and out hologram presents the woman erect, then bowing, then erect—although the bow is probably Leia's bending over to insert the message into the droid. Her plea is "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You are my only hope." Luke's reaction is "She's beautiful," and his question, "Who is she?" It is the image of Leia that prompts Luke Skywalker's quest, not just to help a princess, but as the opening scroll suggested, to "save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy."

Leia is asleep in a chamber on Vader's vessel when Luke, dressed as a stormtrooper, sees her in person for the first time. Her reaction, upon awakening, is glib, sarcastic, and defiant: "Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?" This sort of initial jibe would be voiced repeatedly in upcoming decades by evolving princess heroines in animated films ranging from *Mulan* to *Shrek* to *Tangled.* After Leia, no longer would princesses be passive and salvaged simply with a kiss. When Luke identifies himself, she rushes with him from her cell, meets Han Solo, shows her prowess with a blaster, and wonders aloud, "When you came in here, didn't you have a plan for getting me out?" Leia concocts a scheme to get away: "Into the garbage chute, flyboy." Clinging to cleanliness and avoiding filth and whatever

loathsome monsters reside in it may be stereotypical feminine mandates but are of less concern to Leia than escaping and getting the operations plans for the Death Star to her allies in the Republic. Leia's descent with Han and Luke into the slime briefly imperils them but ultimately leads to their escape from Vader and the delivery of the Death Star plans to the rebel forces.

In some ways, Leia resembles Ilsa Lund from *Casablanca*. With a world war raging around her, Ilsa is positioned and caught between two men—the cynical, "I don't stick my neck out"[11] unless I'm well-paid Rick Blaine (rather like Han Solo) and the idealistic, committed Victor Laszlo (Luke). Yet, while Ilsa never is in possession of the letters of transit, Leia is directly responsible for the Death Star's operations plans being stolen and finally transmitted to the rebels and, because of what the plans revealed, the Republic aircraft's successful assault on the Death Star. Despite Leia's sharp tongue and judgmental disposition, Han becomes more and more taken with her: "She's got a lot of spirit. Do you think a princess and a guy like me . . . ?" Later in *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, prior to what seems to be a suicide airborne attack on the Empire, Vader, and the Death Star, Luke tries to convince Han not to leave, to throw himself into the fight. Leia, however, almost Ilsa-like, contends, "He's got to follow his own path—no one can choose it for him." As she stands with other Republic command personnel, Leia anxiously observes the attack. After the successful destruction of the Death Star, at the massive ceremony, it is Leia—smiling coyly, supportively, and lovingly—who bestows the medallions on Han and on Luke.

Jeanne Cavelos, in her essay "Stop Her, She's Got a Gun! How The Rebel Princess and the Virgin Queen Became Marginalized and Powerless in George Lucas's Fairy Tale," makes the following statement: "Leia initially appears to be a powerful figure, a princess and senator and the bearer of key Rebel intelligence. Over the course of the trilogy, though, her importance dwindles and her power evaporates before our eyes."[12] Perhaps this is true, but at the beginning of *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back* Leia is positioned as the ultimate level of command at the rebel base on Hoth, the one who must make difficult life-and-death decisions. She gives the command to close the gates even though Luke has not yet returned, and she orders only two fighters to escort each Rebel ship fleeing the base. "Two fighters against a Star Destroyer?" questions one of the rebels.[13] Yet Leia's command is accepted and "understood" as she closes with "Good luck." When her passage to the Rebel aircraft is blocked, Han responds with "I'll get her out on the *Falcon*." On board, Han's and Leia's insults and passions for one another continue. Hiding from the Empire's forces, Han lands on a large asteroid in a cavern, actually the inside of a huge space slug, and there the sometimes "scoundrel" and the order-giving princess share a kiss. It can

be argued, however, that their ebb and flow exchanges do not necessarily indicate a deterioration of Leia's regal authority or unyielding commitment to the cause. In fact, her leadership converts Han (and later saves both him and Luke) where no other forces could have done so. The only thing Leia does not do is to serve as a pilot, but she recruits all the best pilots to her side; this does not suggest disempowerment at all.

It seems an overstatement to insist that Leia's importance and power diminish throughout *The Empire Strikes Back*. When the *Falcon* reaches Bespin, Han introduces Leia to his old friend and running mate Lando Calrissian even though Leia remains guarded and dubious. Initially it seems that Han merely finds himself with yet another rival for Leia's attentions when Lando continually compliments her. In truth, the already present Darth Vader has induced Lando to capitulate and to turn over to him Han, Chewy, Leia, and C-3PO so he might use them to lure and trap Luke, whom he hopes will join him in preserving the Empire and accepting the Dark Side of the Force. When planning and preparing for Luke's capture and containment, Vader orders that Han be used to test the carbon freezing chamber. As Han is led away, Leia does break from her icy resolve and proclaim, "I love you." Han's response may seem self-serving, glib, and noncommittal but, considering their likely fates, not completely surprising and perhaps even in Leia's best interests. On one level, Leia's "I love you" and Han's "I know" can be viewed as the woman being the first to acknowledge her feelings followed by a male reaction representing comic relief and ultimate ego ("How could you not?"). Or the exchange can be understood as an assurance from Leia and the reason that she will not desert or forsake Han while his response equates to "I know you won't." (This, of course, sets up the identical "I love you"—"I know" assertion and response a film later in *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*.)[14] As a witness to Han's impaled-in-a-scream carbon freezing, Leia seems steadfastly set on one day releasing and rescuing him not as a singular, lovelorn diversion but as a necessary and meaningful part of the ongoing crusade against the Emperor, Vader, and the Empire. Also, besides her commitment and concern for Han and for the Republic, there is her link with and commitment to Luke Skywalker. When, with Lando's assistance, she, Chewy, and C-3PO are able to escape Bespin, it is Leia who, sensing with the Force the wounded Luke's danger and need, orders the craft to return for him. Leia, Luke's fraternal twin, shares his ability to use the Force.

Regarding *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi* (the last film in the opening trilogy), a question surfaces as to whether the motion picture presents Leia as a still progressively dynamic character or as one weakened, descending into less-than-laudatory importance and stature. Certainly she still has her courageous moments. She first appears disguised as a bounty hunter leading the bound Chewbacca before Jabba with a plan to free Han

Solo from his frozen-in-carbon confinement. When he awakens and anxiously calls "Who is it?"—in a reversal of the knight saving the princess—her response is "Someone who loves you." Leia's plan, however, backfires as Jabba and his henchmen appear, take her prisoner, put her in slave-girl attire, and chain her to the slimy gangster warlord. Whether one agrees or disagrees with creator George Lucas's using Leia in the sequence as a visual homage to the artfully drawn science-fiction pulp magazine covers of the 1930s, her stone-faced reduction to scantily clad decoration is short-lived. When Luke Skywalker appears, lightsaber at the ready, a disguised Lando in support, Leia moves into offense.

Jeanne Cavelos dismisses Leia's efforts, saying, "After failing to free Han, Leia is regulated to the role of a minor foot soldier in Luke's elaborate plan, so Luke's heroism can take center stage. Defenders of Leia's character point to her strangling Jabba as proof that she's a strong action hero. While she does, at last, take some offensive action, how heroic is it to kill a defenseless slug? . . . [Lucas] would have given Jabba a gun or toxic slime so he could pose more of an immediate threat."[15] Perhaps, however, that would seem more Lucas's oversight than Leia's. Certainly, Jabba, who kills several other people in the first ten minutes of the movie, is no "defenseless slug." In fact the whole scene can be read as one strategic action rather than as a failure followed by a rescue. As the first wave, Leia releases Han from the carbon freezing and thereby makes possible the second wave of the rescue led by Luke. Of course, Luke, too, is captured by Jabba's traps, and neither he nor Leia seem particularly worried about an inability to escape. Cavelos seems to be reading the stereotypes while denying the structure of the film itself. One cannot blame Leia for being weak just because she escapes while wearing a string bikini. The image of slave girl, sex object, and victim turning on her captor has its own connotations and logic, especially since the act carries with it not only vengeance but the value of ridding her comrades of Jabba's sadistic presence and ongoing interference with their more important mission. Leia's supporting the others does not end with her slaying of Jabba. At Luke's direction, she takes command of a pivoting machine gun and gives them cover.

Cavelos also points out that while Lando and Han achieve the rank of general, with each in charge of the vital two-pronged maneuver to destroy the Death Star and the Emperor, Leia, it seems, no longer has any sort of title—other than princess. Nevertheless, she performs as a civilian leader for the military and civilian elements of the rebellion. For Leia, the rank of general could be a demotion. She just puts on the special operations camouflage outfit anyway.

While Lando is to lead the air assault, Han's mission—to disable the shield generator—seems equally doomed and impossible. Chewy volunteers to accompany Han, and—to Han's delight—so does Leia. His grin

at her announcement that she will join them signals that he is not overly protective of her nor feels it would be more appropriate that she be safe and out of the way. Leia's decision to join Han, Chewy, C-3PO, and R2-D2 (and later Luke, when he, too, states that he will go with them) means the band will be together again facing dangerous, impossible odds just as they had when they first met and triumphed aboard Vader's space craft in *A New Hope*.

On Endor where the shield protector resides, Leia and Luke on jet cycles manage to out-maneuver stormtroopers. It is Leia who first makes contact with and befriends one of the Ewoks, the teddy-bear-like inhabitants who will help in the coming battle. It is not Leia who persuades the Ewoks to join the fight but rather Luke who, using the powers of the Force, causes "the god-like" C-3PO to elevate off the ground and captivate the natives. C-3PO further wins over the Ewoks when he acts out stories of the previous adventures of the Republic fighters. Still in the troubled, ebb-and-flow assault on the shield reactor base, Leia once again proves her courage, dedication, and importance. When she and Han seem surrounded and outgunned, it is Leia (hiding her firearm) who responds to Han's reverent "I love you" with "I know" (reversing their exchange from *The Empire Strikes Back*) before opening fire and gaining them time to knock out the bunker door, capture the rest of the defending stormtroopers, and destroy the reactor shield.

Even if Leia's contributions to the victory on Endor are significant, Cavelos takes issue with something else:

> The most obvious blow to the coherence of Leia's character comes with the revelation that she is Darth Vader's daughter. . . . [T]he news that Bail Organa is not her father and that Vader is should be a huge blow to her. Yet Leia reacts as if she's on Prozac, saying she's "always known." Being told that Vader—the archenemy who has pursued her through the trilogy, tortured her twice, killed countless Rebels, frozen her love, tormented and cut off the hand of her other love, and repressed countless planets—is her father ought to trigger the biggest outburst from Leia we've ever seen. It ought to be the climax of an internal conflict that's been building in her throughout. But the character hasn't been given the development and care she deserves.[16]

Cavelos seems to feel cheated that Leia does not go into hysterics (which in itself would have constituted a stereotype)—that, on some level, she "always knew." However, this does not necessarily seem any more wrong than in *The Searchers*—a film Lucas references often in the *Star Wars* movies—when Debbie tells Martin Pawley, "I remember. I remember from always."[17] That the adopted Leia knows Bail Organa is not her real father, that she has memories of her real mother, that there is a psychic connection between her and Luke that is sibling based, that Vader is closer to, more alert to, and

more interested in his male heir than his daughter are all possibilities that explain Leia's reaction and its context. Interestingly, Leia, like Luke, has inherited the Force from their father. Unlike Luke, however, Leia inherits far more strength and strategy from her mother than the naïve, hapless Luke has, especially in the earliest movies. He alone does not have the Force, as the remaining prequels of the series show, but he does seem totally thrown by his realization about his father, despite his Jedi powers, because he does not understand the world around him. In light of the prequels, Leia seems to be the inheritor of the republic of her mother (complete with white fighting outfits and elaborate hair); Luke seems to be the inheritor of the Jedi side only. It is not in Leia's character to be hysterical but rather unflappable and duty-bound because her problem is less with Vader as her enemy and more with the empire itself as her enemy. She is concerned with the larger chess game of Republic vs. Empire, while Luke is trying to find his father (who identifies Luke by his last name more than by the Force) and learn to grow up from his country-boy childhood. Despite this, one need not disagree completely with Cavelos and her contention that Lucas and the other screenwriters could have provided more care, could have treated Leia better. But this does not necessarily merit the accusation that "Leia's character was clearly not a priority in the original trilogy where she was shunted aside, undermined, and neglected."[18] Leia's contributions—not just to the destruction of the Empire but also to the establishment of a new kind of female role model and to the possibility of feminine potential in cinema and popular culture—merit a degree of appreciation.

That may or may not be true for Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman), Leia's mother and a character who precedes her in storyline but who followed her in appearance before the movie-going public. Although Diana Dominguez expresses disappointment with Queen Amidala's death scene in *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*, she admits, "I remember my reaction during *Episode I* when Padmé arrives on Naboo with Anakin and Qui-Gon Jinn in order to try to save her people and draws her gun. I turned to my friend and said, 'Now we know where Leia gets it!'"[19] Jeanne Cavelos echoes the sentiment: "Like Leia, Queen Amidala appears at first to be a heroic woman and a strong, compelling character. Amidala is a committed fighter in the struggle against powerful, evil forces, a strong leader and brilliant prodigy as skilled with politics and diplomacy as with a gun."[20]

Both Cavelos and Dominguez, however, attest that, by the end of episode III, Amidala no longer symbolizes and, indeed, is far removed from the best possibilities for feminist-tinged action. Instead she is reduced to an abused, broken woman capable of embracing not causes and spirit but death and despair. Similar in type to Ophelia and Jocasta, facing pregnancy, betrayal, and defeat, perhaps she even represents the post-1970s backlash against feminism.

While Padmé holds the rank of "elected Queen" in episode I (how muddled are the political arenas in *Star Wars*?), her age is given as fourteen; in episode II, she is twenty-four, and in episode III, twenty-seven. Much more than Leia and more in line with the rise and importance of American and British female political leaders in the 1980s, Padmé Amidala mirrors the era in which the films premiered. Indeed, Padmé voices the most painful and prophetic political observation of the six films when, in episode III—while Palpatine is being crowned Emperor—she bitterly and scornfully observes, "So this is how liberty dies—with thunderous applause."[21]

It is more, though, than disenchantment at the fall of the Republic that explains Padmé's demise. As the medical robot informs Obi-Wan and the man who will become Leia's adoptive father, "Medically she is completely healthy. For some reason we can't explain, we are losing her." Obi-Wan intones, "She's dying?" "We don't know why. She has lost the will to live. We must operate quickly if we are to save the babies."

The parallel action sequence uses cross-cutting to connect the two medical operations, one that reveals the transformation of what remains of Anakin Skywalker into Darth Vader and the other that results in the births of Luke and Leia, followed by the death of Padmé. After naming the girl "Leia" and the boy "Luke," Padmé whispers her dying words to Obi-Wan: "There is good in him. I know there is."

Jeanne Cavelos charts Padmé's deteriorating status throughout episodes I–III and notes, "A once-imposing woman, Amidala is disempowered and marginalized until she becomes completely ineffectual. . . . While Amidala's commitment and power are undercut, her leadership, intelligence and political skill decline over the course of the trilogy."[22] Cavelos does not explain or singularly connect Amidala's long string of failures after episode I to her falling in love with and marrying Anakin; nor, though, are those acts of the heart understandable or excusable. She observes, "Amidala's intelligence and judgment receive another blow when she reveals she's pregnant. She asks Anakin, an unstable, homicidal egomaniac eight years her junior, 'What are we gonna do?' If she wants a useful answer, she'd do better to ask Jar Jar."[23]

Dominguez, in her analysis of Leia's mother, dwells on Amidala's acceptance of death as an ultimate but not unfamiliar act of betrayal of feminism. Dominguez does acknowledge a possible metaphorical explanation for the downward spiral of Amidala's character as provided by online scribe Lazypadawan: "When the Republic era passes, she passes. . . . She cannot adapt to this new galaxy. . . . She also suffers not only the death throes of the Republic and its ideals, she also suffers with the physical and spiritual pain Anakin endures."[24] Another explanation, however, proposed by Dominguez for Amidala's losing "the will to live" connects to the queen's becoming "disturbingly symbolic of the rising statistics of domestic and relationship abuse among young women in the country."[25] Later in the

article, Dominguez contends that Amidala "is focused mostly on Anakin's needs, almost to the exclusion of her own compromised career and status. Her death is both a supreme form of martyrdom (her last words and thoughts are about Anakin's innate goodness) and a supreme form of selfishness (she dies only thinking about how she cannot live without Anakin, dismissing the children she has just given birth to)."[26]

Both Cavelos and Dominguez argue that the inadequacies and inconsistencies with Leia to an extent and with Amidala to an even greater degree rest not just with the fictional daughter and mother but with their creators. If Lucas and the other screenwriters and filmmakers had taken more time, care, and informed deliberation, the two female characters, instead of finally being disappointing, might have been so much more. Yes, the sass and spirit of Leia and Amidala did generate pride and did appeal to females in a fashion unusual for moviegoers of the time. Because, though, some women strongly believe Leia and Amidala could have been and accomplished more, they register a sense of disappointment and opportunities missed. This is certainly understandable. *Star Wars* was and is not just a series of six films; for many viewers, the linked serial episodes are a touchstone into what they once were and what they became.

Yes, there is a certain foolishness to all this. In *Episode VI—Return of the Jedi* when Luke asks Leia what she remembers about their mother (he can't remember anything), Leia responds, "How beautiful she was." In *Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*, however, it transpires that Amidala dies shortly after holding and naming the two babies, and it does not seem possible that Leia, mere minutes old, could have remembered anything.

What is worth emphasizing is that in a celluloid world a long time ago—which now seems in a sense far, far away—female characters were often not memorable or, worse, not present at all. Because of Princess Leia and Queen Padmé Amidala, the galaxy seems a better, safer, and a more tolerant, aware, and focused place. *Star Wars* helped billions of movie, videotape, and DVD watchers see the world and various elements in it—men, women, fathers, sons, daughters, mothers, robots, technology, war, aggression, empires, republics, scientific possibilities and probabilities—differently, perhaps in a broader, clearer, more hopeful way. Leia and Amidala share in that accomplishment as well.

NOTES

1. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, directed by David Yates, 2009, Warner Bros.

2. "*Empire*'s The 100 Greatest Movie Characters," *Empire*, accessed May 21, 2010, http://www.empireonline.com/100-greatest-movie-characters/default.asp?c=89.

3. Jesse Scheden, "Top 25 *Star Wars* Heroes: Day 4," *IGN*, accessed April 3, 2011, http://uk.stars.ign.com/articles/898/898949p3html.

4. Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 200.

5. Brooker, *Using the Force*, 200.

6. Vivian Gussin Paley, *Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 22.

7. Diana Dominguez, "Feminism and the Force: Empowerment and Disillusionment in a Galaxy Far, Far Away," in *Culture, Identities, and Technology in the Star Wars Films: Essays on the Two Trilogies*, ed. Carl Silvio and Tony M. Vinci (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 116.

8. Steve Perry, *Shadows of the Empire* (New York: Spectra, 1996).

9. Dominguez, "Feminism," 116.

10. *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas, screenplay by George Lucas, 1977 (Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2004), DVD Special Edition.

11. *Casablanca*, directed by Michael Curtiz, 1942, Warner Bros.

12. Jeanne Cavelos, "Stop Her, She's Got a Gun! How the Rebel Princess and the Virgin Queen Became Marginalized and Powerless in George Lucas's Fairy Tale," in *Star Wars on Trial: Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Debate the Most Popular Science Fiction Films of All Time*, ed. Jeanne Cavelos and Bill Spangler (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2006), 307.

13. *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*, directed by Irvin Kershner, screenplay by Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan, story by George Lucas, 1980 (Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2004), DVD Special Edition.

14. *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*, directed by Richard Marquand, screenplay by Lawrence Kasdan and George Lucas, story by George Lucas, 1983 (Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2004), DVD Special Edition.

15. Cavelos, "Stop Her," 311.

16. Cavelos, "Stop Her," 313.

17. *The Searchers*, directed by John Ford, 1956, Whitney/Warner Bros.

18. Cavelos, "Stop Her," 313.

19. Dominguez, "Feminism," 124.

20. Cavelos, "Stop Her," 314.

21. *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*, directed by George Lucas, screenplay by George Lucas, 2005 (Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2005), DVD Special Edition.

22. Cavelos, "Stop Her," 316.

23. Cavelos, "Stop Her, 317–18.

24. Dominguez, "Feminism," 123.

25. Dominguez, "Feminism," 125.

26. Dominguez, "Feminism," 123.

8

The Over-Soul of the Force

Emersonian Transcendentalism in the *Star Wars* Saga

Anne M. Boyd

Through his lectures, essays, and poems, the nineteenth-century author Ralph Waldo Emerson devised a system of beliefs centering on the interconnectivity of individuals and nature. In his 1841 essay on the subject, Emerson posits that all things in nature are part of

> that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains everyone to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One.[1]

Emerson sought to create language for the mystical relationship between humans, nature, and divinity. Yet, from his initial critical reception to the present, scholars have taken issue with Emerson's optimism; because he denies any negative characteristics inherent in human beings, some have found a lack of credibility in his transcendentalist theory. Even his friend, Henry James Sr., referred to Emerson "as his 'unfallen friend,' who astonished him by his 'unconsciousness of evil.'"[2] Writing in the same period, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville argued that this strand connecting individuals and nature united instead the darker, more sinister aspects of the two. Focusing on the individual gone astray, both authors wrote tales in which characters look inward and find greed, vindictiveness, pervading

fear, and sometimes outright hatred. As F. O. Matthiessen notes, Hawthorne and Melville believed that "human nature can be more truly represented in the wishes of its heart than in its actions, since such a portrayal has 'more of good and more of evil in it; more redeeming points of the bad and more errors of the virtuous; higher upsoarings, and baser degradations of the soul.'"[3] For Hawthorne and Melville, then, Emerson's flawless individual in relation to nature could not exist.

In *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, Robert D. Richardson Jr. documents Emerson's conversations with thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth. Steeped in German philosophy, Eastern thought, and scientific theory, Emerson forges his systems of belief. Richardson refers to Emerson's readiness to begin writing *Nature* as "the confluence." Richardson observes:

> The central element of Emerson's inner life during these years is not to be found in any one or even any six of these currents. Rather it arises from the astonishing and inevitable convergence, the rising potential of this concord of waters. Its direction is to affirm the autonomy and sufficiency of the individual consciousness, an affirmation that will form henceforward the broad central current of Emerson's life and writing.[4]

Emerson's concordance of experience and philosophy—his theory of transcendentalism—contains a conglomeration of ideas that spans several cultures and millennia. Intriguingly, more than a century later, George Lucas achieves a similar confluence of thought.

In the late 1970s, Lucas introduced his concept of the Force. In its two faces, the Light Side and the Dark Side, both transcendental and anti-transcendental elements emerged. In preparation for his films, Lucas studied anthropology for two years; he examined myths and psychology from myriad cultures, much in the same way Emerson earlier examined philosophical beliefs. Lucas frequently credits this research—writings by Joseph Campbell, the *Flash Gordon* serials, and the Westerns of his childhood—as the basis for his trilogies. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Lucas explains, "What happens is when you sit down to write something, all of the influences in your life come into play, the things that you like and the things that you've seen, the observations you've made, that's ultimately what you work with when you're writing."[5] Lucas incorporates Hawthorne's and Melville's anti-transcendental response into his works as the necessary evil that must be worked through to achieve Emerson's tenet of self-reliance, to realize his depiction of the Over-Soul, and to understand his ideas about humanity and nature. In Lucas's world, the sinister aspects bring about the balance Emerson claimed possible. Rather than trying to deny or obliterate any sense of inherent evil, Lucas creates characters that grapple with issues of anger, control, fear, and hatred.

EMERSONIAN FORCE

In his essays, Emerson's notion of interconnectedness acts as a catalyst for new discussions surrounding the individual and his or her relation to the environment. Focusing primarily on the individual in nature and society, Emerson's tenets of self-reliance and symbiosis with nature have infiltrated popular culture over the past century and a half. From yoga and Pilates to modern decor, Eastern influence permeates contemporary American society. Few contemporary artists' works have truly resonated with Emersonian thought in the same way as George Lucas, who depicts his notion of the Force, a concept similar to the Over-Soul, and dichotomizes characters that either embrace or defy that unifying strand.

Employing a futuristic setting, Lucas clearly delineates schools of thought that mirror transcendentalist and anti-transcendentalist beliefs. The Jedi advocate for an unencumbered inward study to reveal self-reliance, recognition of the individual's role in relation to nature, and a belief in the independent experience of living that eliminates societal influence. Followers of the Dark Side, or the Sith, focus on elements that corrupt their character, allowing their egos to be contaminated by their insecurities and such fears as loss of possessions or of control over other human beings or nature. Lucas asserts that an excess of passion leads to this negative side. He begins this exploration through a character's plea to the last of an ancient race of Jedi, those who subscribe to a belief that hinges on the concept of the Force. This, the Jedi Obi-Wan Kenobi defines, in *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, as "an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together."[6] Kenobi's explanation of the unifying strand in nature echoes Emerson's description of the Over-Soul, which comprises "the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One."[7] In Lucas and Emerson, it's imperative for the individual to recognize his or her interconnectedness with nature in order to tap into the truths that the universe speaks through that divine strand.

Obi-Wan Kenobi and the Skywalkers

In the first *Star Wars* film, *Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977), Lucas introduces his Jedi Knights through the character of Obi-Wan Kenobi. The protagonist, Luke Skywalker, and his uncle purchase new droids for their farm. While cleaning them, Luke notices a holographic message stored in the memory of the smaller one that shows a princess begging for the help of a General Obi-Wan Kenobi. Because the droid, R2-D2, has been programmed to find Kenobi, he escapes. Kenobi first enters the scene when Luke searches for R2-D2. Through Kenobi, Luke finds the Emersonian

teacher noted in "The Over-Soul," one who speaks "*from* within, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact."[8] A Jedi himself, Kenobi teaches Luke that the Jedi Knights "were the guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic" and encourages Luke to begin training.[9] In the article "The Fall of the Rebellion; or, Defiant and Obedient Heroes in a Galaxy Far, Far Away: Individualism and Intertextuality in the *Star Wars* Trilogies," Tony M. Vinci explains, "The characters of Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda are both presented initially in the original trilogy as champions of individuality and as representations of the power of expressive autonomy. Their primary function in the original trilogy is to define the nature of the Force."[10] Vinci argues that Kenobi's training of Luke "focuses on inspiring Luke to trust his intuition and create a personal relationship with the Force," a concept Emerson heralds in several of his essays in *Nature*.[11]

Obi-Wan enters Luke's life when Luke is searching for purpose; something larger, deeper. In his essay "The Uses of Great Men," Emerson discusses the importance of not trying merely to emulate those who teach us. He finds a great man greater "when he can abolish himself, and all heroes, by letting in this element of reason, irrespective of persons; this subtilizer and irresistible upward force, into our thought, destroying individualism; the power so great, that the potentate is nothing."[12] Obi-Wan specifies that the Force allows all creatures' life and strength, and only through communing with it does the individual achieve his purpose. He recognizes his own limitations with dry remarks like "I'm getting too old for this sort of thing," when contemplating another mission and that Luke should become a Jedi, providing continuity to the next generation.[13] He echoes Emerson's concluding remarks, that man must "tame the chaos; on every side, whilst he lives, to scatter the seeds of science and of song, that climate, corn, animals, men, may be milder, and the germs of love and benefit may be multiplied."[14] Yet Obi-Wan's treatment of Luke illustrates that he recognizes the importance of individual choice and destiny; he counsels, "You must do what you feel is right, of course," when Luke initially refuses to accompany him on the mission.[15]

The adherence to a transcendental lifestyle emerges more fully in Obi-Wan's training of Luke. As he introduces Skywalker to the ways of the Force, Obi-Wan instructs him to quiet his mind and learn to rely on instincts, letting the Force guide him. Like Emerson's teaching that "the heart in thee is the heart of all" and "the sources of nature are in his own mind, if the sentiment of duty is there,"[16] Kenobi imparts this lesson by having Skywalker battle laser blasts without sight, arguing that it is possible to feel the will of the Force guide him, and that vision can be "clouded." Luke's friend, Han Solo, mocks his attempt to allow the Force to flow through him, criticizing "hokey religions," and stating the contemporary belief that "ancient weapons are no match for a good blaster at your side, kid."[17] Yet, through

shedding his internalized skepticism and refusing to conform to popular sentiment, Skywalker does learn the Emersonian lesson that "the faith that stands on authority is not faith."[18] At Kenobi's urging, Luke attempts the lesson again and is successful, claiming he "really could feel something." Obi-Wan again encourages Luke on his path, stating, "You've taken your first step into a larger world."[19]

In the first part of *Nature*, Emerson explains that when in nature "all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me."[20] Obi-Wan imparts a similar idea on the flight to the Death Star. As they travel toward the mission, he recoils, as if in pain. Kenobi describes his experience: "I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced."[21] Lucas employs dramatic irony to relate his point. In the previous scene, the Empire has blown up Princess Leia's home planet. Lucas uses the device to depict a psychic connection between the Jedi and nature. We become aware that the Jedi have a means for divining events. Like the figure of the transparent eyeball, Obi-Wan is privy to the universal current. Yet he does not have the power to intervene; he is nothing.

A former Jedi, Vader is also attuned to this psychic connection through the Force. He senses Obi-Wan's presence when they arrive at the Death Star. By including Vader in this universal strand, Lucas creates a problematic character. Vader is twisted and evil, tapping into the Force only to achieve his own ends; yet Vader still respects the power of the Force. Upon meeting Obi-Wan, his former teacher, Vader draws his weapon. In his book, *The Journey of Luke Skywalker: An Analysis of Modern Myth and Symbol*, Stephen A. Galipeau points out that in this battle, "one is gripped by the desire for power and dominance; the other trusts his personal integrity and a deeper knowledge of the Force."[22] Perhaps because of this idea, Obi-Wan, clearly no physical match for Vader, relies on Emersonian principle. He states, "You can't win, Darth. If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine."[23] Recognizing both his place in the universe and inner divinity, Obi-Wan articulates the Emersonian idea from the second section of *Nature*: "Nothing divine dies. All good is eternally reproductive. The beauty of nature reforms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation."[24] When Obi-Wan notices that Luke is watching from a distance, he holds his weapon aloft and allows Vader to slay him as further teaching of this principle. In *Star Wars: The New Myth*, Michael J. Hanson and Max S. Kay assert that "Kenobi's sacrifice is an archetypal act, representing selflessness and the understanding of an individual's role in a greater story. Its effectiveness lies in the belief that the sacrificed, in death, will be more powerful than he could have been in life," which comes to fruition when Obi-Wan "continues to be with Luke

wherever the young man is in his adventure. This is a form of immortality. Kenobi has been completely absorbed into the alternate world of *Star Wars*: the world of the Force."[25] Again, in his teacher role, Obi-Wan exemplifies Emerson's ideal in "Uses of Great Men," illustrating the "power in love to divine another's destiny . . . and, by heroic encouragements, hold him to his task."[26] Because Obi-Wan's voice counsels Luke at the end of the first film to "use the Force" and "let go," Luke switches off his computer system and attunes himself to the Force.

Kenobi's spirit continues to assist Luke on his quest to become a Jedi in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). Luke lies in the snow, exhausted after battling a snow monster and in danger of freezing. Obi-Wan appears as a vision, instructing Luke to continue his training with "Yoda, the Jedi Master who instructed me."[27] Kenobi's image is immediately replaced by tangible Han Solo, who rescues Luke. When Yoda seems unwilling to train Luke, Obi-Wan intercedes, furthering Luke on his journey, underscoring the Emersonian idea that "with each divine impulse the mind rends the thin rinds of the visible and finite, and comes out into eternity, and inspires and expires its air."[28]

Yet, in the next trilogy, which tells the backstory of the Jedi, Lucas makes us keenly aware that Luke is not Obi-Wan's first attempt at training a Skywalker. In *The Phantom Menace* (1999), Obi-Wan has achieved Padawan status; he learns the ways of the Force by accompanying Qui-Gon Jinn, a Jedi Knight, on his missions as he prepares to become a Jedi. No longer teacher and advisor, Obi-Wan exemplifies what Steven A. Galipeau discusses as the nature of the Jedi Knight: a combination of "two archetypal figures: the knight and the priest" because "the knights have a responsibility to the spiritual reality of the Force, and they are guardians of the people and the Republic."[29] After being mortally injured in a fight with Sith lord Darth Maul, Qui-Gon makes Obi-Wan promise to continue training Anakin, even against the will of the Jedi Council. Here we find Obi-Wan Kenobi in his prime; his physical strength, patience as teacher, and relationship with the Force cast him in a different light than in the first trilogy. At the beginning of *Attack of the Clones* (2002), Obi-Wan teaches Anakin and is clearly frustrated, believing Anakin's abilities "have made him, well, arrogant."[30] Taking Anakin to task, Obi-Wan disdains the youth's need to be heralded as great, insisting that only fidelity to self and the Force should matter. Emerson noted that genius "is a larger imbibing of the common heart. It is not anomalous, but more like, and not less like other men."[31] Obi-Wan tries to instill this in Anakin. In contrast to the nurturing, encouraging Obi-Wan we earlier witnessed, this younger version is more concerned with his missions. In serving the Republic, Obi-Wan observes, assesses, and puts himself in great peril for the common good.

During this phase of his life, Obi-Wan personifies Emerson's notion of the hero. In "Heroism," Emerson explains, "Self-trust is the essence of hero-

ism. It is the state of the soul at war, and its ultimate objects are the last defiance of falsehood and wrong, and the power to bear all that can be inflicted by evil agents. It speaks the truth, and it is just, generous, hospitable, temperate, scornful of petty calculations, and scornful of being scorned."[32] Obi-Wan personifies this description in *Revenge of the Sith* (2005) when he recognizes Anakin's turn to the Dark Side. During their battle on the lava planet of Mustafar, Obi-Wan shrieks at Anakin, "You were the chosen one. You were supposed to destroy the Sith, not join them, bring balance to the Force, not leave it in darkness!" Conquering him in battle, Obi-Wan tells Anakin that, as teacher, "I have failed you."[33] Faced with one unwilling to participate in the divine strand, who instead roots himself in fear, power, and evil, Obi-Wan chooses to focus on the next generation. In *American Renaissance*, F. O. Matthiessen argues that Emerson "saw that hero variously as the reflective man, the genius, the seer, the torch-bearer, the radical, and the spiritualist."[34] Obi-Wan, at different moments, assumes each role.

Yoda

In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Lucas fully articulates the transcendental nature of the Force through Yoda. Mary Henderson discusses the nature of Yoda in *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, finding Yoda to be a "pre-hero" archetype: He "is master both of the powers of nature and of those found deep within himself, although this mastery is often hidden behind a simple, naïve façade; he shares a mystic solidarity with wild creatures."[35] Upon revealing himself, Yoda criticizes Luke for his lack of patience and clarity of mind. When Luke protests, Yoda rebuffs him: "For eight hundred years have I trained Jedi. My own council will I keep on who is to be trained. A Jedi must have the deepest commitment, the most serious mind. This one a long time have I watched. All his life has he looked away, to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was, what he was doing."[36] Yoda's chastisement of Luke evokes Emerson in "Self-Reliance." Emerson writes "that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. . . . The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray."[37] Similarly, Yoda holds that in Luke's search for his destiny, he ignores what is directly in front of him.

As Skywalker's training continues, it becomes more entrenched in transcendental theory. Again, Yoda expounds upon the Force, using language that echoes Emerson's "The Over-Soul." Yoda, on the Force: "Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you; between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere."[38] His description in terms of light parallels the language Emerson uses in "The Over-Soul": "All goes to show

that the soul in man . . . is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of intellect and the will; is the background of our being, in which they lie—an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all."[39]

During Luke's training, the philosophical aspects of the Force emerge. Yoda counsels Luke to "feel the Force" flowing though him so that he can become one with it. Luke's x-wing, firmly ensconced in a swamp, sinks further during this scene. At Yoda's urging, Luke half-heartedly agrees to attempt to remove it using the Force. "I'll try," he says, skeptically. But Yoda quips, "No. Do or do not. There is no try." When Luke proves unable to perform the task, Yoda bows his head, disappointed, and then removes the ship himself. Remarking that "size matters not," Yoda attributes Luke's failure to his comment "I don't believe it" when watching Yoda's success. Commenting on the film in the DVD version, Lucas explains that he tried to focus on the "power of positive thinking." Lucas believes that success stems only from the power to "believe in yourself, believe in what you're doing," and that this common wisdom used to pass down to each younger generation, but no longer was when he was writing his script. Because of the void, Lucas says that he needed to create a new myth, one that reintroduced those concepts of self-worth, of a sense of connectedness.[40] In the section of *Nature* titled "Spirit," Emerson claims "man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite" because spirit "does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old."[41] Lucas develops the machinations of Yoda and Luke to illustrate the regenerative and creative powers of something greater.

As Skywalker learns to embrace this belief, Lucas accentuates the enhancement of Luke's powers, employing Emerson's idea of metamorphosis. Initially, it seems odd that Skywalker does not follow a gradual pattern of development, linear in that after building skill upon skill he emerges as a Jedi. But the progression Lucas depicts reflects a mindset, an enlightenment that emulates Emerson's "ascension of state," achieved when "the heart which abandons itself to the Supreme Mind finds itself related to all its works, and will travel a royal road to particular knowledges and powers."[42] Yoda teaches Skywalker that being in touch with the Force will allow him omniscience: "through the Force, things will you see. Other places, other thoughts, the future, the past."[43] He asserts that this knowledge will bring clarity of purpose and a higher awareness. Lucas again hearkens to Emersonian ideas, which counsel that being attuned to the soul allows one to ascend "to this primary and aboriginal sentiment, we have come from our remote station on the circumference instantaneously to the centre of the world, where, as in the closet of God, we see causes, and anticipate the

universe, which is but a slow effect."[44] Throughout the films, Luke's development is not linear; he has flashes of connection on his path to becoming a Jedi.

Between lessons, Luke undergoes an initiation in a cave. Designed to test his fears, it beckons to Luke. Yoda tells him he will not need weapons, but Luke ignores his advice. In the DVD commentary track, Lucas explains that this scene is about "learning that the Force is within you and at the same time you create your own bad vibes. So, if you think badly about things, or you act badly, or you bring fear into a situation, you're going to have to defend yourself or you're going to have to suffer the consequences of that." Lucas maintains that because Luke takes his lightsaber into the cave "he's going to have combat. If he didn't, he wouldn't. He is creating this situation in his mind because, on a larger level, what caused Darth Vader to become Darth Vader is the same thing that makes Luke bring that sword in. . . . He has the capacity to become Darth Vader, simply by using the hate and fear and weapons, as opposed to using compassion and caring and kindness."[45] For Emerson, the same holds true. He warns "when simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise—and duplicity and falsehood take the place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as interpreter of the will, is in a new degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which they are not."[46]

Lucas offers a closer examination of the Dark Side in *The Empire Strikes Back*, a system in which the passions supersede inherent divinity. Yoda asserts that this Dark Side is composed of "anger, fear, aggression" and cautions that these emotions can "dominate your destiny, consume you."[47] By dichotomizing the two sides of the Force, Lucas explores the polarization of transcendentalist and anti-transcendentalist ideals. Throughout the movies, Lucas identifies revenge, anger, and insecurities with the Dark Side, and creates characters whose motivations exemplify traits embodied by anti-transcendentalist protagonists. Lucas, through the medium of Yoda, specifies that a Jedi must let go of these passions to do the will of the Force and that the Jedi's way is a solitary one. Emerson, too, believes: "The soul gives itself, alone, original, and pure to the Lonely, Original, and Pure, who, on that condition, gladly inhabits, leads, and speaks through it."[48] When Luke leaves his training to save his friends, Yoda attempts to intervene. Like Obi-Wan in *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, however, Yoda places the responsibility squarely on Luke's shoulders: "Decide you must."[49] He recognizes that the respect for another individual's choice supersedes his own teachings and hopes. Luke promises to return and finish his training, and Yoda reserves articulating his full disappointment in the decision until after Luke's departure.

Luke does return to Yoda in *Return of the Jedi* (1983), grasping that the experience he gained in the interim will sustain him, according to the Jedi Master. Yoda, on his deathbed, proclaims, "Already know you that which you need." When Luke claims, "Master Yoda, you can't die," Yoda responds sagely, "Strong am I with the Force, but not that strong! Twilight is upon me and soon night must fall. That is the way of things, the way of the Force." In his final breath, Yoda urges Luke to "pass on what you have learned."[50] Yoda then becomes spiritual guide and vision to Luke. Like Obi-Wan, Yoda hearkens to Emersonian language about regenerative powers and the nature of spirit before his death.

We meet Yoda again in the second trilogy. From the outset, Lucas conveys Yoda's elevated position in the Jedi council. Contemplating Anakin's training, Yoda channels the Force to understand the meaning of the prophecy that a boy will bring balance to the Force. In this trilogy, however, Lucas uses the Yoda character both as a vehicle to transition from the mouthpiece for traditional, uplifting Emersonian dicta and as a means for exploring the more troubling side of the transcendentalist worldview. Yoda warns against the destruction that arises when an individual embraces elements of the Dark Side; he senses the potential for evil quickly. After Anakin's interview, Yoda sagely notes, "The chosen one the boy may be. Nevertheless, grave danger I fear in his training."[51] His clairvoyance emerges more fully in *Attack of the Clones* when he intervenes to stop evil Count Dooku. Dooku sends inanimate objects flying toward Yoda, who is able to stop them, control them, or put them aside. "Powerful you have become, Dooku. The Dark Side I sense in you," Yoda comments. When Dooku claims, "I've become more powerful than any Jedi, even you," while shooting electric currents, Yoda counters, "Much to learn you still have," and gathers the beams into a ball, flinging them back. Yoda later tells the council, "Lies, deceit, creating mistrust are his ways now."[52] He advises Obi-Wan, horrified by Anakin's apparent corruption in *Revenge of the Sith*: "Twisted by the Dark Side young Skywalker has become. The boy you trained, gone he is, consumed by Darth Vader."[53] When confronted with a fallen Jedi, Yoda does not seek to redeem him; he cautions against affiliation and withdraws.

Yet when presented with one in danger of falling away from Jedi teaching, Yoda preaches Emersonian tenets. In discussing Emerson's reactions after his first wife's death, Richardson notes, "After this time Emerson believed completely, implicitly, and viscerally in the reality and primacy of the spirit" but specifies that "what Emerson felt most keenly was a sense of loss and alienation that expressed itself specifically as a consciousness of separation."[54] Because of her death, Emerson did just what Yoda suggests. He traveled widely, searched for reality in nature, particularly at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, and recognized "that his own instincts and judgments were solid enough to have stood the test of European experience."[55] Break-

ing away from his grief, Emerson found the basis of his first work, *Nature*. During a conversation with Anakin in *Revenge of the Sith*, Yoda again echoes Emerson when speaking of death and loss. He counsels, "Careful you must be when sensing the future, Anakin. The fear of loss is a path to the Dark Side." Yoda instructs Anakin, "Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force. Mourn them do not. Miss them do not. Attachment leads to jealousy. The shadow of greed that is," encouraging the Jedi to "train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose."[56]

Lucas continues to employ Yoda in the role of mediator between good and evil throughout the prequel trilogy. Championing democracy, Yoda seeks to have each voice in the republic count, this mirroring Emerson's belief in the common man. In the face of a corrupted senate, the council suggests the Jedi take control to ensure a peaceful transition. Yoda believes, "To a dark place this line of thought will carry us. Great care we must take." Yoda recognizes the danger in assuming that the Jedi Force he represents is greater than the community of voices that make the republic work. While he agrees that the Sith must be stopped, he hesitates in assuming autonomous rule. During his battle with the Emperor, Yoda challenges the claim, "At last the Jedi are no more." Straightening himself, Yoda says, "Not if anything to say about it I have." He blasts the Emperor across the room. "At an end your rule is, and not short enough it was." As the Emperor heads for the door, Yoda asks, "If so powerful you are, why leave?" He blocks the Emperor's way with drawn lightsaber. The Emperor warns, "You will not stop me. Darth Vader will become more powerful than either of us," drawing his saber as well. "Faith in your new apprentice misplaced may be, as is your faith in the Dark Side of the Force." Yoda, however, cannot overpower the Emperor, and allows him to believe Yoda dead. Yoda states, "Into exile I must go. Failed, I have." Before his departure, he concocts a plan to protect Vader's newborn twins. He tells Obi-Wan, "Until the time is right, disappear we will." Yoda offers to teach Obi-Wan how to commune with the netherworld and the spirits of the departed Jedi.[57]

Although Lucas closely aligns the Force with Emersonian ideas, by the end of the second trilogy he concedes that darker forces exist and must be combated. Obi-Wan and Yoda introduce the tenets of faith, yet do so to prepare the protagonist to battle evil, both internally and externally. They caution against fear, anger, hatred, and a thirst for power, and detail the ways in which such behavior can lead to destruction. Both characters live a solitary lifestyle communing with the Force and encourage self-reliance and a communion with nature, but their chief function is to set the stage for redemption.

For George Lucas, writing in a post-Vietnam era, reintroducing a sense of redemption to the audience became essential. In interviews, Lucas hearkens

to the movies of his youth, believing they were vehicles of self-awareness that taught young people to become self-reliant. Invoking the monomyth structure Campbell depicted in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Lucas taps into ancient ideas against the uncharted backdrop of outer space. He attempts to define through the Force what religions and philosophies have attempted to for millennia: the inexplicable connectedness to the natural world. For Jung, this unifying strand manifested in his works exploring the subconscious and archetypal phenomena. Campbell, too, traced commonalities of humans' relationship with nature and deities, irrespective of place or time; he juxtaposed stories and art from diverse peoples spanning thousands of years, then identified mirror images. Emerson had created his own explanation of nature and divinity, one that still permeates our society.

The myth Lucas creates in *Star Wars* affirms transcendental and anti-transcendental ideals, perhaps owing to the cynical nature of his target audience. Rather than wholly espousing one position or the other, Lucas asserts that a full exploration of both inherent goodness and inherent perversity lead to realizing a universe in balance. From his depiction of Emersonian themes through the voices of his Jedi, Lucas affirms an Over-Soul of sorts in which nature communes and spirit reigns. Only through a full understanding of these principles can an individual develop the tools necessary to perform in a troubled society. He also traces a journey through the darker side to attain harmony. His treatment of Anakin illustrates the necessity of a fall to bring about redemption. Dramatizing the period before Anakin meets the Jedi, Lucas notes that a prophecy to balance the Force exists. He suggests that despite the peaceful period when Jedi reigned, more was necessary to achieve harmony. Anakin's reckoning of his nature through each of the movies serves as a springboard for examining human traits of fear, anger, and thirst for power. Luke's willingness to recognize those traits within, to hearken to the teachings of the Jedi, yet to follow his own intuition leads to a transformation in their universe. Through these characters, Lucas asserts a renewed sense of optimism during an otherwise pessimistic period in history.

The end of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" holds: "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."[58] This tenet, too, falls closely in line with Lucas's teaching. While he affirms the need to come to terms with the more sinister nature of the soul, his conclusion lies in an Emersonian utopia. Perhaps Lucas suggests that the difference between following the good or evil path lies in the choice of the protagonist. Rather than an inherent flaw or divine strand, the individual—after a grueling process to attain self-knowledge—decides. Through this conclusion, Lucas arrives at the Emersonian confluence, that point at which the individual, now fully aware of the ideologies governing myriad societies, can then set forth upon a determined path.

NOTES

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2. F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 4.
3. Ibid., 337.
4. Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 185.
5. George Lucas, interview with Bill Moyers, *The Mythology of Star Wars* (New York: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2004), DVD.
6. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas; screenplay by George Lucas, 1977 (Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2004), DVD Special Edition.
7. Emerson, "The Over-Soul," 386.
8. Ibid., 395.
9. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*.
10. Tony M. Vinci, "The Fall of the Rebellion; or, Defiant and Obedient Heroes in a Galaxy Far, Far Away: Individualism and Intertextuality in the *Star Wars* Trilogies," in *Culture, Identities and Technology in the Star Wars Films*, ed. Carl Silvio and Tony M. Vinci (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 21.
11. Ibid., 22.
12. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Uses of Great Men," 1850, in *Essays & Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 627.
13. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*.
14. Emerson, "The Uses of Great Men," 632.
15. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*.
16. Emerson, "The Over-Soul," 399.
17. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*.
18. Emerson, "The Over-Soul," 399.
19. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*.
20. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, 1836, in *Essays & Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 10.
21. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*.
22. Steven A. Galipeau, *The Journey of Luke Skywalker: An Analysis of Modern Myth and Symbol* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 65.
23. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*.
24. Emerson, *Nature*, 18.
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9

George Lucas and Freud's Anal Stage Manifestations of Excretory and Vaginal Fear in *THX 1138* and *Star Wars*

Lucy Place

From *THX 1138* to the *Star Wars* trilogy, George Lucas has evolved considerably as a director and storyteller. While *THX 1138* and *Star Wars* are both considered part of the science fiction genre, their characters and core themes may appear vastly different after a cursory viewing. However, when applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory to Lucas's films, it becomes apparent that Lucas is disproportionately preoccupied with the anal stage. Imagery, settings, plot, and characters reflect an anxiety related to Lucas's own entrapment in the anal stage, and this increasingly manifests itself as a fear of excrement and sex. Lucas mediates representations of evil with depictions of fecal matter and this in turn pervades his images of women and sexuality. While *THX 1138* relies on plot, character, and setting to relate this to the audience, Lucas chose to reject this narrative style in *Star Wars*. Beginning in the Special Edition of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, Lucas instead relies on strong imagery of excrement in the character Jabba the Hutt and related vaginal imagery that illustrates female genitalia as an all-consuming and violent entity. Lucas's characters Luke and THX 1138 can be read as extensions of himself, heroes who must conquer their excretory and vaginal fears to become free.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory describes the different phases of psychosexual development that all children go through as they mature emotionally and physically. Certain internal and external factors may cause the child to become stuck or preoccupied with a certain phase, and this will manifest in their personality as they grow to be adults. The anal stage, which first begins from three months to three years of age, is when the child's focus of pleasure is on eliminating or retaining feces. The child learns from his parents during toilet training that he must learn to control

this stimulation.[1] Therefore, the primary focus of the libido is on controlling bladder or bowel movement. For the child, developing this control can lead to a sense of accomplishment and independence. The child can derive pleasure from the retention of his feces, and in turn develop a desire to have this same control in other aspects of his life. During the anal stage, there are two goals. The first is to experience erotic pleasure linked to the anus by controlling defecation. The other goal is to explore ways to manipulate and control the mother.[2] At this point, the child makes a choice of whether he wants to please or challenge the mother by asserting his will.

If the child is not able to move past this primal pleasure, he develops either an anal-expulsive or anal-retentive personality. An individual with an anal-expulsive personality is messy, wasteful, or destructive. An individual with an anal-retentive personality is stringent, orderly, rigid, obsessive—this would most certainly describe Lucas. The psychoanalytic studies of Karl Abraham contend that feces to the child symbolized gifts and money later in life; that is, control of defecation could emotionally represent great value, while loss of control would be seen as excess.[3] Freud argued that excrement is a small and detachable part of the body, similar to a penis or a baby, which can stimulate a mucosal passage by entering and leaving it, and Abraham explains that therefore the anus has excretory functions while serving as an erogenous zone.[4] Excrement and genitals become symbolically interchangeable to the individual. While Freud did not specifically express this, an anal-retentive personality who needs to control excess/defecation may also develop the desire to control a symbolically similar source of pleasure, sexual intercourse. Just as the anal-retentive person fears excrement, he can also come to fear intercourse and the body parts associated with it.

The individual's control over his bowels is connected to a strong pride and feelings that no one else can do anything as well as they do. Patients have expressed that "Everything that is not me is dirt." Neurotics will only take pleasure in possessing a thing no one else has, and will despise any activity that they have to share with other people.[5] This can include sexual intercourse. Obsessive individuals will have difficulty forming relationships with other people and may display destructive tendencies others may consider hostile. Anal-retentive individuals are too self-focused to have a capacity for devotion to others.[6]

Children can develop anal-sadistic fantasies in which objects are attacked by poisoned or explosive fecal matter. An example of this in Lucas's work is Leia physically chained to Jabba the Hutt, a symbolic characterization of excrement. This occurs because the child's fear of his own internal processes becomes too great and he must project this fear into the external world. Therefore, the child will equate his organs, feces, and other internal processes and objects with external objects.[7] In the case of *Star Wars*, these objects range from the garbage compactor to Jabba the Hutt. Excrement

represents poison as the child becomes afraid of his own excrement and sees it as a substance that is dangerous and harmful to his body. This is the basis of hypochondrial fears, and is related to the anal-retentive's need for physical and emotional sanitation.[8] As the child begins to mature, he develops a relationship with other objects and establishes a sense of reality outside his own body. His original object-relationship was one object, the mother's breast that represented his mother as a whole. As the child begins to relate to other objects, he is guided back to his mother's body because it was the primary object of his libidinal pattern and now represents his increasing desire for knowledge about the inside of her body. The inside of the mother's body, her vagina, represents for the child the primary object as well as the outer world.[9] Simply, the child's feelings about inner processes, such as defecation retention and the function of the vagina, helps him develop a fundamental relationship between reality and the external world. In the case of Lucas, this relationship is one of fear. As an orphan, Luke in *Star Wars* has no "breast" to relate to originally, but Lucas relays this struggle to develop a relationship with the outside world through various characters and situations throughout the journey.

These anal-retentive anxieties are manifest in Lucas himself. His close friend Francis Ford Coppola has said that while he welcomes a certain amount of mess in his life, Lucas "is terrified to be embroiled in something like this. He wants his life to be orderly."[10] While *THX 1138* may be an attack on perfectionism, Lucas is obsessed with order and compulsive about detail. In Andrew Gordon's "*THX 1138*: Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Young Man," he explains that every shot of the film was painstakingly planned and "virtually edited into the movie before being photographed."[11] He also shares a story about Lucas lecturing a secretary for buying paper with the wrong color and number of lines. Lucas's crew thought he was impersonal: He never talked to them, joked with them, or confided in them. Lucas acknowledged that his crew felt that he was unfriendly and distant, and it showed in his work. Audiences did not warmly receive *THX 1138*, and it nearly destroyed his film career. Lucas decided, "If they want warm human comedy, I'll give them one, just to show that I can do it."[12] Lucas's later films are distinctly different in tone from his first work, but he is an anal-retentive at heart both personally and professionally. Even though Lucas recognized the need to change his approach to reach more audiences, his rigidity and paranoia remain a fixed component of his work. His personality will always mediate his interpretation of masculine characters and sexuality.

Lucas's first feature-length film, *THX 1138*, presents itself as a critique of both political and corporal order. However, an examination of Lucas's personality and a deeper analysis of the film's structure reveal that his image of THX's society is closer to a subconscious fantasy. The character THX lives

in a dystopian society of the future. The society exists underground and is characterized by its minimalist appearance and antiseptic attitude toward humanity. This world has no room for irregularities as symbolized in the sterile all-white environment where men and women have shaved heads and wear white uniforms. Sex is outlawed, citizens are controlled with drugs, names are replaced with numbers, and Big Brother is always watching. THX is content operating within the hive mindset until his roommate, LUH, begins switching out his daily drug regime. THX begins to make mistakes at work and goes through drug withdrawal. LUH admits that she has fallen in love with him, and after consummating their relationship, they begin to plot their escape.[13]

THX exists in an emotionally controlled society, a place where by definition there can be no emotional untidiness, no physical union: "The movie presents all the common forms of social control: rationalization of space, programmed learning of common ideals, monitoring of human activity, manipulation of human biochemistry, [and] suppression of libido."[14] This social control is an extension of Lucas's need for physical control, which is why THX's sexual awakening proves to be his downfall. *THX 1138* is Lucas's only film to portray a sexual relationship or any nudity. While *Star Wars* is devoid of both, in *THX 1138*, sex results in torture and imprisonment. By losing control over his physical needs, THX is forced to give in to lust. THX goes to confessional on two separate occasions to psychologically cleanse himself. The second time there he vomits on the floor; this uncontrollable urge perverts the sanctity of the space, foreshadowing transgressions to come. When he reaches home, LUH attends to his nausea and then admits she has been manipulating his medication, and by extension his body. When LUH and THX have sex for the first time, they are watched on monitors. They are physically and emotionally vulnerable, and the Big Brother image juxtaposed with this intimate moment symbolizes the deep shame associated with sex.

Sexual desire is the first step to disobeying the system; LUH and THX cannot possibly love each other because THX has only recently acquired emotions and cannot understand empathy or compassion. He is tricked into lusting for LUH, and is annoyed by her lack of control, asking her why she involved him when he was fine before. When they are separated and he learns that she is pregnant, THX wants to save LUH. However, his heroic actions seem to stem mostly from a desire to control his fate and once again possess something: his unborn child. The search for a pregnant LUH and their unborn child is an important metaphor for THX's need to seek control over an extension of his body. However, in Lucas's fantasy, all sexual transgressions must be punished to restore order. LUH pays for her actions. She tricked and seduced THX to be part of her rebellion, and for this she must be killed. Like Leia, the strong and brave woman who

has the foresight to challenge her society becomes subtext, and then must be destroyed: "The only source of change is the mysterious hunger of an inaccessible body. In particular the voracious womb of the natural female subverts social order, as in mythology."[15] LUH represents that which cannot be controlled, the ultimate threat to THX's emotional and physical well-being.

Shortly after LUH and THX have sex for the first time, SEN puts in a request to switch roommates to live with THX. When THX goes to talk with SEN about the new arrangement, they meet in SEN's cramped, minimalist apartment. During their conversation, a toilet peeks out of the bathroom between them. The image of the toilet symbolizes THX's anxiety and increasing awareness that he is about to lose control of everything. To complement this, SEN states, "You rate very high in sanitation . . . we'll be very happy!"[16] While many critics read SEN's motives and characterization as a homosexual threat, in this sexually devoid society SEN is more likely to represent a threat to THX's new order with LUH. SEN is one of several physical barriers that THX must conquer to survive. After their meeting, THX almost dies when he cannot control another bodily function: his sweat. During his shift at work, he is put in a mindlock when his body becomes too stressed to complete the task. Because he can no longer control himself, he is arrested. During his trial, the ramifications of his actions become clear: "If society is to free itself of these deviants . . . they must be destroyed. We must not continue to consume such erotics. We must exterminate the source of sin."[17]

THX's prison is truly a state of mind. For confronting his anxieties toward disorder by allowing himself to engage sexually with a woman, THX must be tortured and jailed. When he and SEN decide to break free, it is only a matter of walking to the farthest edge of the white void. This is not only a metaphor for THX's entire world, where breaking free is only a matter of getting to the surface, but also for his mind. The purity of the prison, the cleanliness and order only exist because the prisoners themselves maintain it. After SEN, THX, and their new friend, SRT, open the door to the rat race outside, SEN is caught up and lost in the crowd. The audience feels no sympathy for him, because that is where he belongs—his messy insanity and questionable sexuality belong with those other pulsing, needing bodies. Opening the door into this madness is THX's expulsion into the disorder he has so carefully avoided his entire life—in effect, the loosening of the bowels and of his control.

To show emotion, THX must be purged from his society. THX successfully escapes, but once he reaches the surface, it is uncertain what will happen to him. The ambiguous ending is an extension of Lucas's own uncertainty about embracing his impulses and confronting his anxiety. The final image depicts THX's literal expulsion into a new world. We can also see this image

of rebirth as "symbolic suggestion of excretion. Such imagery is not unusual for Lucas: in *Star Wars*, Luke and his cohorts are almost crushed to death in the garbage room aboard the Death Star, and in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke descends deep into the bowels of Cloud City, only to fall out its bottom!"[18] *THX 1138* is Lucas's seminal work, and THX represents a distilled, primal urge from which the *Star Wars* saga would emerge.

As disparate as THX's world may seem from Luke Skywalker's, the *Star Wars* saga continues to draw upon imagery related to Lucas's preoccupation with the anal stage of development. *Star Wars* also more clearly illustrates Lucas's anxiety toward women and their genitalia. Luke goes on a journey of self-discovery that involves reconciling his relationship with his father with his determination to become a Jedi. It is important to remember that Luke is a totally chaste character, receiving only innocent familial kisses from his sister Leia; it is through his journey to become a man that Luke necessarily confronts the Dark Side of his sexuality.

Like *THX 1138*, Lucas is emotionally antiseptic in *A New Hope*. When Tarkin orders Leia's home planet, Alderaan, destroyed, panic flashes across her face. However, this is the only emotion that Lucas prescribes to Leia. After Alderaan explodes in front of her eyes, the scene immediately cuts away from Leia's anguish.[19] The audience's attention immediately refocuses on the next scene, and there is no time to process the obliteration of an entire planet and its inhabitants. This emotional distance, aided by a quickly paced plot and editing, is evident throughout the film. When Luke discovers that stormtroopers have brutally murdered his aunt and uncle, he wastes little time before moving on with Obi-Wan. In a sense, like Alderaan, the Empire has destroyed Luke's own tiny planet.

However, more important than Lucas's pacing and approach to plot is the way he unconsciously embeds Freudian symbols throughout the films. The most important symbol of excrement throughout the saga is the thug Jabba the Hutt. Just before their escape from Tatooine, in the Special Edition of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, Han Solo must contend with Jabba. Jabba is on the screen for only a few moments, but Han's debt to him is a thread throughout the three films. He is more physically grotesque than any of the characters encountered in the Cantina scene; while they all possessed alien features, their bodies retained a familiar human shape. Jabba is completely snail-shaped, with no legs and very few features besides his gaping mouth. The texture and color of his flesh and the shape of his body characterize Jabba as a living, breathing pile of feces. It is no coincidence that one of the most excessive, merciless characters in the films resembles the very filth that an anal-retentive fears the most.

A New Hope begins to articulate the feminine threat almost immediately once Luke and Han break Leia out of her prison. During their botched escape from the Death Star, Leia instructs them to follow her down the gar-

bage chute: She is the one who blows open the wall to the chute, guiding Han and Luke to enter the forbidden space. Once inside the compactor, a monster drags Luke beneath the filth, suffocating and nearly drowning him in garbage. Then, the walls begin to close in on them, imminently crushing them to death. This is an anal-retentive's nightmare. While the filth can certainly connote human waste and the compactor the human bowel, it is important to recognize that the image of the compactor is also that of a vagina. The monster that almost kills Luke has tentacles that resemble the appendages of the vaginal Sarlacc in *Return of the Jedi* and their enclosed, wet, cave-like surroundings suggest a sort of malevolent womb or vagina. When the walls begin closing in, Luke has to trade the fear of being suffocated and consumed in this vaginal space for the fear of being crushed by it.

Return of the Jedi is the culmination of Lucas's fixation on the anal stage. From *THX 1138* to the final film in the *Star Wars* trilogy, Lucas displays an increasing preoccupation and anxiety toward cleanliness and excretion. The first twenty minutes of *Return of the Jedi* stands in direct opposition with the simplicity and minimalist environment of *THX 1138*. R2-D2 and C-3PO enter the cave to Jabba's palace, and two hideous characters emerge from the darkness. The first is a creature who looks like he has a penis draped around his shoulders; the other resembles an ogre from a fairy tale who grunts like a pig.

Jabba's palace is reached only by venturing deep within the cave. Luke must journey into this vaginal space to find at its heart a repulsive, corpulent Jabba the Hutt. Jabba represents pure id. He smokes, has an insatiable appetite, and resides in a den of excess. He eats frogs while women dance around him to jazz and blues music. Jabba also appears to have a perverted sexual appetite. He holds a green alien woman hostage, and while she is scantily clad and dances for Jabba, he never once kisses or strokes her. Instead, he feeds her to his pet, Rancor.[20] Consumption is Jabba's primary source of pleasure, whether he is eating or feeding others—he represents the oral stage of development. His mouth spans the width of his head, his tongue a character unto itself. Jabba's body is a pile of excrement that endlessly consumes and imposes control on others without even moving from his pedestal. It is fitting that one can only reach his home by journeying through a vagina-like cave; Jabba is Lucas's fear of that which resides within woman.

Leia's capture and enslavement by Jabba is a play on contrasts. Her white, conservative wardrobe throughout the saga characterizes Leia as chaste. Her appearance connotes purity and even frigidity more than any other character. As Jabba's prize, he chains her up and keeps her close to his belly. This seems a most vile punishment, and her nudity makes her seem even more vulnerable to fecal contagion. When he first grabs Leia, there is green goo

coming out his nostrils and white sludge on his mouth that wasn't there in earlier scenes. He licks his lips with his swollen tongue, and his little tail wiggles as Leia sleeps against his belly.[21] The surroundings distort her feminine beauty, and her presence serves to cement Jabba's sickening effect on the audience.

During Luke's confrontation with Jabba, he falls through a trap door and down into Rancor's cave. The extent of Lucas's anal imagery in *The Empire Strikes Back* involves Luke falling down through the bowels of Cloud City and his moments suspended upside down in the ferocious and carnivorous Wampa's ice cave on Hoth.[22] However, these cave images pale in comparison to Luke's confrontation with Rancor, who resides in a cave within Jabba's palace. If Jabba is pure id, the Rancor represents the pre-lingual voraciousness of that id. While Jabba may reside in a bowel-esque vaginal space, the Rancor dominates the deeper womb-like cave. This beast also physically resembles excretory matter, but is far more menacing than Jabba, with sharp teeth and huge claws. Rancor tries to eat Luke, but he is able to slow the beast down by jamming a bone in its mouth.

Taken prisoner once again, Luke and Han are brought to the Great Pit of Carkoon within the Dune Sea desert. There resides Sarlacc, a massive gaping hole in the ground, a red mouth surrounded by thorny fangs. A swollen flower bud tongue emerges from the center, and with its tentacles, Sarlacc entraps its prey. This particular vaginal image is symbolic of the fear of vagina dentata, or a toothed vagina.[23] Fear of genitalia demonstrated with monstrous vaginal imagery suggests that Lucas deeply fears the heterosexual experience. Due to the child's fantasy that the vagina is a dangerous organ, the vagina cannot become a source of sexual pleasure because of the anxiety it imposes.[24] Many critics have suggested that Luke expresses veiled homosexual impulses through his strong bonds with other men throughout the films. However, Lucas's aversion to sex should not suggest repressed homosexuality, but instead a fear and aversion to women.

THX 1138 and Luke Skywalker repeatedly confront their excretory and vaginal anxieties displaced on them by their creator, George Lucas. Lucas's personality dictated that his characters would face the same challenges he contends with internally, as suggested by his need for order and control in both his work and personal relationships. It is never clear whether either hero is able to move past the anal stage to form healthy internal awareness and sexual bonds, or whether they remain plagued by morbid associations of excrement to objects in the outside world. Understanding this aspect of Lucas's personality is integral to appreciating his full body of work. Plot, characters, and setting all serve as expressions of Lucas's unconscious fears and desires. Knowledge of the anal stage and Lucas's background provides his loyal audience and critics with one more clue into the creative genius of this highly complex auteur.

NOTES

1. Rod Plotnik and Haig Kouyoumdjian, *Introduction to Psychology*, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010), 392.
2. Plotnik and Kouyoumdjian, *Introduction to Psychology*, 438.
3. Karl Abraham, *On Character and Libido Development: Six Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 166–67.
4. Abraham, *On Character and Libido Development*, 37.
5. Abraham, *On Character and Libido Development*, 171.
6. Abraham, *On Character and Libido Development*, 175.
7. Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), 147.
8. Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 145.
9. Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 147.
10. Andrew Gordon, "*THX 1138*: Portrait of the Artist, 18.
11. Gordon, "*THX 1138*: Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Young Man," *Film International* 3, no. 15 (2005): 18.
12. Gordon, "*THX 1138*: Portrait of the Artist," 19.
13. *THX 1138*, directed by George Lucas, 1971 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2004), DVD.
14. Bernard Beck, "The Overdeveloped Society: *THX 1138*," in *Hal in the Classroom: Science Fiction Films*, ed. Ralph J. Amelio (Dayton, OH: Pflaum, 1974), 80.
15. Beck, "The Overdeveloped Society: *THX 1138*," 81.
16. *THX 1138*.
17. *THX 1138*.
18. Gordon, "*THX 1138:* Portrait of the Artist," 20.
19. *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas, 1977 (Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD.
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21. *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*.
22. *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*, directed by Irvin Kershner, 1980 (Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD.
23. Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 195; Abraham, *On Character and Libido Development*, 112.
24. Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 195.

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10

Homosexual Romance and Self-Realization in *Star Wars*

Roger Kaufman

One striking characteristic of the alien galactic civilization portrayed in the *Star Wars* saga is the prominence of strongly committed, intimate same-sex partnerships, as exemplified by the age-old master/apprentice training paradigm of the Jedi Knights. We also find such ardent affiliations among the dark Sith Lords and in many other communities of the vast multi-planet society. Although none of these single-gender bonds are overtly shown to involve romance or sex, and the filmmakers' intentions in this area remain unclear, a gay-centered psychoanalytic explication of twinship dynamics may shed light on their possible homosexual nature, and the consequential symbolic import potentially revealed by such an illumination.

The forthcoming discussion is inspired by the theory and inner-work-practice known as *contemporary Uranian psychoanalysis*, developed over the past four decades by gay activist and psychologist Mitch Walker, who has synthesized concepts from Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian psychology, and the gay liberation movement, among other influences, to create an affirmative method for better appreciating the existential validity and symbolic relevance of same-sex romantic love, relationships, and related identities.[1] Words such as *homosexual* and *gay* are valued in this inward-focused approach for their ability to respectfully highlight the robust authentic attractions and forms of subjectivity they refer to, thus moving in a different ideational and ethical direction from so-called postmodern modalities, which attempt to deconstruct these vital experiences and the terms used to honor them.[2]

Uranian psychoanalysis follows C. G. Jung's elucidation of the living *symbol* as not merely a sign or signifier for a roughly equivalent thing, but rather as always representing something much greater than itself, usually a pattern of archetypal meaning that cannot yet be fully comprehended or actualized

in a more direct manner.[3] For example, Jung recognized that the fecund cross-cultural image of a man and woman joined in sexual intercourse, as seen, for example, in Buddhist *yab-yum* meditative objects and the king-queen *coniunctio* illustrations of medieval European alchemists, provides a compelling symbol for the reconciliation of psychic "opposites" (e.g., female/male, love/hate, life/death), an integrative process necessary for the individuational goal of achieving psychological wholeness, or what Jung described as personal realization of the archetypal *Self*, the God image in the psyche.[4] The felt experience of such a mysterious unifying accomplishment is likely to be more expansive than any effort to articulate it, explaining the need for a symbol to represent its potentiality. Nevertheless, Jung made many efforts to elucidate this potent imagery, including the proposal that a mentally propulsive symbolic *coniunctio* could occur in each person's mind as a developmental result of the ego encountering an inner erotic opposite-sex personification of the *soul*, or inner felt source of life, which Jung called the *anima* in men and the *animus* in women.[5]

I would suggest that such a heterosexist characterization of intrapsychic connections does not adequately address the internal experience of homosexual individuals. To correct this limitation, Walker has identified a same-sex archetype termed the *double*, equally present as a potentiality along with the anima/animus in the unconscious of all people.[6] When a person's innate psychic life force, known as *libido*, is organized homosexually (by the deeper purpose revealed in becoming that way orientationally), it constellates "a special, erotic, twin" within who functions as a same-sex *soul figure*, an internal homosexual muse and lover-ideal, "felt to be the 'source of inspiration'" inside the mind.[7] When the double soul is projected out onto another person of the same sex, homosexual romantic feelings ensue. Internally, the soul twin can reconcile the conscious ego with the unconscious psyche through an enlivening same-sex *coniunctio*. Such an egalitarian imaginal coupling of sames can also integrate the opposites, becoming a galvanizing engine for better realization of that luminous vital enigma that is the more fully actualized Self.[8]

The six live-action *Star Wars* films produced by George Lucas provide fruitful territory in which to seek resonant images suggesting the ego's engagement with the double soul figure, because the development of and challenges in many conspicuous, steadfast same-sex attachments prove essential to the central storyline. However, since the films never show or directly allude to sexual unions between characters of the same gender, another investigatory route is required to divine these same-sex twinships' underlying libidinal organization and any resultant psycho-spiritual implications.

In earlier essays exploring *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Avatar*, and other films,[9] I identified the prevalence of nine distinctive partnership qualities inspired by Walker's Jungian research on the particular nature of same-sex romantic pairs found throughout history, mythology, and literature.[10] Based

on these previous efforts, the following analysis shows how the ideals of the archetypal double as soul figure are most strongly realized in single-gender bonds that are *passionate*, *affectionate*, *mutual*, *primary*, *enduring*, *lifesaving*, *transformative*, *transmissive*, and *transcendent*. An examination of twenty-eight same-sex partnerships in *Star Wars*, as documented in table 10.1, does indeed find many, sometimes even all nine specific attributes clearly portrayed, strongly suggesting the underlying presence of the erotic double spurring same-sex romance and homosexual self-realization. This analysis will be initially demonstrated by describing how each of these essential characteristics factor into the abiding fellowship between Jedi Knight Qui-Gon Jinn and his Padawan learner, Obi-Wan Kenobi, as portrayed in *The Phantom Menace*.

Table 10.1. Analysis of Same-Sex Partnerships in the *Star Wars* Film Saga (See Key at Bottom for Abbreviations)

Partnerships	*Classifications*
Qui-Gon Jinn & Obi-Wan Kenobi	PA, A, M, PR, E, L, TF, TM, TS
Qui-Gon Jinn & Anakin Skywalker	PA, A, M, PR, L, TF, TM
Qui-Gon Jinn & Yoda	PA, A, M, E, TF, TM, TS
Qui-Gon Jinn & Jar Jar Binks	PA, A, M, L, TF, TS
Obi-Wan Kenobi & Anakin Skywalker	PA, A, M, PR, E, L, TF, TM, TS, C, R, FS
Obi-Wan Kenobi & Yoda	PA, A, M, E, L, TF, TM, TS
Anakin Skywalker & Yoda	PA, A, M, L, TF, TM, TS
Anakin Skywalker & Watto	A, EX, FS
Darth Sidious & Anakin/Darth Vader	PA, A, PR, L, TF, TM, EX, F, FS
Darth Sidious & Darth Tyranus	PA, PR, TF, TM, EX
Darth Sidious & Darth Maul	PA, PR, TF, TM, EX
Luke Skywalker & Obi-Wan Kenobi	PA, A, M, PR, E, L, TF, TM, TS, R, FS
Luke Skywalker & Han Solo	PA, A, M, E, L, TF, C
Luke Skywalker & Yoda	PA, A, M, PR, E, L, TF, TM, TS
Luke Skywalker & Darth Vader/Anakin	PA, A, M, PR, E, L, TF, TM, TS, C, R, FS
Padmé & Queen Amidala	PA, A, M, PR, E, L
Padmé Naberrie & Cordé	PA, A, M, L
Padmé Naberrie & Dormé	PA, A, M, L
R2-D2 & C-3PO	PA, A, M, PR, E, L, TF, TS
R2-D2 & Anakin Skywalker	PA, A, M, L
R2-D2 & Luke Skywalker	PA, A, M, E, L
C-3PO & Anakin Skywalker	PA, M, L, TF, F
Han Solo & Lando Calrissian	PA, A, M, E, L, C
Chewbacca & Han Solo	PA, A, M, PR, E, L
Chewbacca & C-3PO	PA, A, M, L
Boba & Jango Fett	PA, A, M, PR, E, L, TF, FS
Nute Gunray & Rune Haako	PA, M, PR, E
Two-Headed Troig: Fode & Beed	PA, A, M, PR, E
Luke Skywalker & Princess Leia	PA, A, E, L, TF, O

Key: PA = passionate; A = affectionate; M = mutual; PR = primary; E = enduring; L = lifesaving; TF = transformative; TM = transmissive; TS = transcendent; EX = exploitive; C = competitive; R = redemptive; F = Frankenstein motif; FS = father-son motif; O = opposite-sex biological twins

QUI-GON JINN & OBI-WAN KENOBI: EMBLEMATIC JEDI PARTNERSHIP

The entire *Star Wars* epic begins with a pronounced image of same-sex twins. In the opening scene of *The Phantom Menace*, two almost-identical hooded figures enter a sleek conference room on a large space station. They simultaneously remove their hoods, allowing viewers to see for the first time the faces of Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan. Their movements are highly synchronized, each holding his breath at the same moment as they sense poison gas filling the room; together they collaboratively fight their way out of the trap against oncoming robotic soldiers. In the following adventure, these Jedi continue to flow in symbiotic movements, often identical, sometimes complementary, almost always exquisitely sensitive to the actions of the other. Their devoted affiliation epitomizes the well-tested training method of the Jedi Order, where young Padawan learners are committed to a tight one-on-one relationship with their masters, a pattern that we could call "monogamous," especially since the Jedi Code requires masters to have only one apprentice at a time.[11]

When we meet Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon, their warm attachment is already mature, and they are almost equal in power and ability. Viewers witness their reciprocal regard steadily grow as they accomplish courageous tasks such as saving a queen, liberating a slave boy, and battling a mysterious villain. Their steadfast bond is sadly broken when that nefarious adversary, Darth Maul, impales Qui-Gon. However, it is in this searing moment that the true depth of the two Jedis' emotional closeness is revealed. Obi-Wan, unable to save his master this time, cries out an extended "*NOOOOO!*" of anguish.[12] After he succeeds in decimating Darth Maul, Obi-Wan rushes to the side of his wounded comrade and cradles him in his arms. Qui-Gon tenderly strokes Obi-Wan's cheek with his finger as he dies. Then Obi-Wan leans his face on his master's, overwhelmed by grief.

Now we can consider how the nine partnership attributes named above apply to the alliance between Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan. Their link is clearly *passionate*, most poignantly demonstrated during Qui-Gon's dying moments, although throughout their affiliation it is clear that they share strong feelings for one another, sometimes in joking and arguing, more often in a kind, supportive manner. Thus, they also have an *affectionate* attachment, demonstrated in their last minutes together, and, for example, when Obi-Wan apologizes for a previous disagreement, to which Qui-Gon responds by emphatically predicting: "You will become a great Jedi Knight."[13] Additionally, their interaction is increasingly one of *mutual* relating, seen in how they function as a seamlessly coordinated team, responding instinctively to one another's cues. Despite their divergent master/apprentice roles, they experience a fond connection "of profound equality and deep familiarity."[14]

The resilient fellowship between these two Jedi is also, during their years together, the *primary* relationship in each man's life, surpassing all others in intensity and time spent in the other's company. They are virtually inseparable, traveling everywhere throughout the galaxy as a team, with the constant closeness such space-faring logistics entail. Their humane affiliation is *enduring* in that it survives harrowing encounters with massive sea monsters, multiple lightsaber battles, and other daunting obstacles. Even Qui-Gon's tragic death does not end their sturdy link, as viewers learn at the end of *Revenge of the Sith*, when Yoda explains to Obi-Wan that his former master, Qui-Gon, has "learned the path to immortality . . . [and] returned from the netherworld of the Force."[15] Furthermore, "To commune with him, I will teach you,"[16] Yoda announces to Obi-Wan's surprise and delight, just before the younger Jedi heads to Tatooine for what turns out to be nineteen years of hiding. Evidently, Obi-Wan is not so alone now with the ability to relate with his master's spirit, ensuring a truly durable partnership.

While both are still in corporeal form, Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan have several occasions to protect each other's physical safety, thus giving their bond a vital *lifesaving* attribute. Their dynamic is also deeply *transformative*: as with all affiliations between Jedi masters and their Padawan learners, the foremost purpose of the alliance between Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan is to reshape the less seasoned person into a full-fledged Jedi Knight, one adept at manipulating the Force, the primal energy that makes life possible. When we first meet apprentice Obi-Wan, he is already far along in his metamorphosis to knighthood, a rank he achieves at the end of *The Phantom Menace*.

The life-changing teaching approach Qui-Gon employs with Obi-Wan can be additionally described as having a *transmissive* characteristic, since it can be reasonably imagined that Qui-Gon would have found various visceral ways to help his apprentice come to know the Force by feeling it within himself, perhaps by activating its movement through Obi-Wan's body. A much older Obi-Wan is possibly remembering such earlier events with Qui-Gon when, in *A New Hope*, he tells Luke Skywalker about the Force: "It surrounds us, it penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together."[17] Such "penetration" is evidently an integral part of the years-long master/apprentice structure of the Jedi Order, which in the case of Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon extends beyond death in the form of "communing," making their irrepressible connection also *transcendent*, crossing the veil between life and death.

In reviewing all the attributes of the everlasting partnership between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Qui-Gon Jinn, we can now detect an enlivening dynamic that is at once *passionate*, *affectionate*, *mutual*, *primary*, *enduring*, *lifesaving*, *transformative*, *transmissive*, and *transcendent*. Such a coalescence of lush qualities evoking the archetypal double as soul figure in an affiliation between two virile men might best be described by the word *romantic*,

suggesting that their connection could be *homosexual*, a term that in context more accurately evokes the libidinal richness of their bond than possible alternatives such as *homoerotic* or *homosocial*, which seem too euphemistic and evasive.

We can similarly identify the categorical attributes just detailed in many other significant Jedi relationships, including, with some painful complications, in the Obi-Wan/Anakin Skywalker bond, as well as in the Obi-Wan/Luke and Yoda/Luke pairs. Furthermore, this pattern of ardent same-sex alliance has obviously been the *standard* mode of operation for the Jedi Order for more than a thousand years. And with the sole exception of Anakin, none of the male Jedi Knights are ever shown to have any sort of sexual or amorous involvements with women, such liaisons actually forbidden in the Order.[18] Yet, based on the current examination, this monastic life appears to be anything but chaste. Instead, what is intimated are compelling same-sex romantic encounters that greatly accelerate psycho-spiritual growth.

To amplify further these initiatory relational themes, it may be helpful to appreciate how the samurai tradition of Japan was an important influence in George Lucas's original conception of the Jedi Knights, as he has explicitly acknowledged.[19] What is less clear is whether Lucas was aware that this warrior tradition encouraged sexual union between warriors and their apprentices, a sacred practice called *shudo*, or "way of the youth," leading to spiritual illumination.[20] In 1492, essayist Ijiri Chusuke wrote:

> In the world of the nobles and warriors, [male] lovers would swear perfect and eternal love, relying on no more than their mutual goodwill . . . [and] they were greatly moved by the spirit of this way . . . [which] must be truly respected and . . . must never be permitted to disappear.[21]

The "mutual" and transcendent nature of "eternal love" between men is amply demonstrated in these thoughts, while the transformative and transmissive nature of such homosexual partnerships is captured in a text from 1653:

> If you learn the teachings of the Buddha and expect to achieve Awakening, you will surely practice *shudo*. For this way is really like that of the true Awakening, in that we may give ourselves wholly to it.[22]

By devoting themselves "wholly" to same-sex love, the samurai warriors were able to reach enlightenment. The fifteenth-century Zen monk Ikkyu, who also practiced *shudo*, expressed it this way: "Its pleasures are like an endless circle; men shout with pleasure when they attain entrance."[23] Likewise, we can see that the Padawan learners in *Star Wars* experience their own kind of "awakening" in the Force through close, transmissive affiliations with their masters. In this context, the Force functions in the same

way we see homosexual libido spur the same-sex dynamics in both historical samurai culture and imaginal *Star Wars* society. Thus, we understand the Force as a visceral representation of homosexual libido.

These evocative themes of meaningful same-sex love echo supportively through many impassioned relationships throughout the diverse cultures shown in *Star Wars*, as in the unlikely odd-couple pair of R2-D2 and C-3PO, as well as with Queen Padmé Amidala and her dedicated bodyguard Sabé. One more example of a spirited twinship is the bilingual, two-headed, four-armed announcer for the Tatooine pod races portrayed in *The Phantom Menace*, an ebullient Troig named Fode and Beed, two male individuals sharing one body who speak and even dance together in unabashed, joyful, rhythmic harmony.

ANAKIN SKYWALKER'S ARDUOUS JOURNEY THROUGH THE DARK SIDE

The *Star Wars* saga can be read as Anakin Skywalker's life story, in which he ultimately fulfills his destiny as "The Chosen One" who will "bring balance to the Force,"[24] yet he must survive a grueling descent into the shadow-side before his eleventh-hour redemption. For many hopeful years prior to his fall, Anakin develops a hearty bond with Obi-Wan Kenobi, a pairing with clear parallels to the earlier partnership Obi-Wan experienced with Qui-Gon, though with Obi-Wan now assuming the master role. This newer affiliation features a *passionate*, sometimes antagonistic father-son dynamic, yet also a more *affectionate*, brotherly connection, as shown in the rousing opening scene of *Revenge of the Sith*. Here Obi-Wan and Anakin, in identical Jedi fighters, spiral together in exquisite alignment through a chaotic space battle, reminiscent of the similar kind of synchronized ballet Obi-Wan previously enjoyed with Qui-Gon. When robotic parasites overwhelm Obi-Wan's craft, Anakin disobeys his order to abandon him in favor of their mission, saying, "I'm not leaving without you, Master."[25] Obi-Wan may officially hold the senior position, but the relationship has been equalized and made *mutual* by Anakin's rapidly increasing skill and audacity. The reciprocal nature of Obi-Wan and Anakin's link is referenced in the novelization of *Revenge of the Sith* by Matthew Stover when he writes: "Blade-to-blade, they were identical. After thousands of hours in lightsaber sparring, they knew each other better than brothers, more intimately than lovers; they were complementary halves of a single warrior."[26]

The energetic fellowship between Obi-Wan and Anakin also frequently leads to many *lifesaving* opportunities, as shown, for example, in an early scene of *Revenge of the Sith*, when Anakin must lug an unconscious Obi-Wan on his back through an unstable spaceship to bring him out of danger

and imminent death. Afterward, the comrades lightly banter about whether Anakin has saved Obi-Wan's life nine times or ten. Such an impressive history of close engagement creates the environment for the *transformative* and *transmissive* attributes of this Padawan/master exchange, as the younger man grows under Obi-Wan's constant companionship and mentorship, dramatically changing from a powerless slave boy to one of the galaxy's most skilled Jedi Knights. Ultimately, their relationship is also *enduring* and *transcendent*, reappearing together reunited as ghostly presences in *Return of the Jedi* after their corporeal challenges have ended. As with Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon, this impassioned partnership has all the characteristics of a romantic bond, though they must pass through an excruciating, decades-long gauntlet of hatred, violence, and despair before their redemptive eternal union.

Anakin's terrible conflict with Obi-Wan and descent into darkness is spurred in large part by his attraction to Padmé Naberrie, shown to be corrupting of Anakin and lethal for Padmé, also drawing the entire civilization into tyrannical oppression. This is the one prominent heterosexual dynamic in the entire saga. The only other notable opposite-sex courtship, between Han Solo and Princess Leia, played mostly for the comedy found in their hot/cold flirtation, has relatively low impact on the course of larger events. The more fateful, destructive liaison between Anakin and Padmé suggests that Lucas is intentionally making a comment about the personality-degrading, society-destroying dangers of unbridled heterosexual desire.[27]

As a Padawan learner, Anakin has pledged to forgo any attachments outside the Jedi Order. Yet, he can't resist pursuing a secret affair with Padmé after they become reacquainted at the start of *Attack of the Clones.* It seems that Anakin's libido is organized bisexually, as his eros is drawn to significant interactions with powerful individuals of both genders. His reunion with Padmé brings great pain, however. "Now that I'm with you again," Anakin groans, "I'm in agony. The closer I get to you, the worse it gets. . . . I can't breathe. . . . I will do anything you ask."[28] As their connection deepens, Anakin becomes increasingly paranoid that Padmé will die, a distortion shrewdly nurtured by Chancellor/Emperor Palpatine, who is actually Sith Lord Darth Sidious, the true "menace" in the saga.

Episodes I–III gradually reveal the nature and identities of the Sith, cunning warriors eager to engage the Dark Side of the Force, accessed through anger and fear, while the Jedi strive to distance from such negative states, working to ally with the Force's light side. Yet, as Palpatine explains to Anakin during a private encounter, "The Sith and the Jedi are similar in almost every way, including their quest for greater power."[29] A key feature of that likeness is the closely knit master/apprentice partnership, perhaps in some ways even more intimate and passionate for the Sith than the Jedi since the dark warriors always have only one pair active at a time without

any additional hierarchy. As Yoda explains in reference to the Sith, "Always two there are. No more. No less. A master and an apprentice."[30]

Palpatine/Darth Sidious engages in what I can perhaps best describe as a *seduction* of Anakin to the Dark Side. For bait, he uses the promise that he can teach Anakin how to use the Force to bring Padmé back to life if she were to die, though Anakin's libidinal energy quickly shifts away from Obi-Wan *and* Padmé toward Darth Sidious, as evidenced by how Anakin uses almost the same words to swear loyalty to the Sith Lord he not-so-long-before had expressed to Padmé. Kneeling in front of Sidious, Anakin proclaims, "I will do whatever you ask," and the Sith Lord, reverberating with ecstatic anticipation, exclaims, "The Force is strong with you!"[31]

In psychological terms, Anakin has been overwhelmed by his shadow, the dark aspect of the unconscious where each person's more shameful and aggressive urges and fantasies reside. One of Jung's primary insights was that the shadow-side must be confronted and made conscious to be better integrated rather than acted out unconsciously in physical or emotional violence.[32] Moving away from the persistent Christian doctrine of eternally splitting good and evil, Jung argued that imaginal desegregation of the shadow through self-confrontation provides a better moral solution.[33] Because Anakin fails to reach any conscious awareness of his own destructive aggression, he becomes increasingly delusional, finally believing the Jedi are seeking to dominate the Republic when in fact it is he and his new master, Darth Sidious, who wish to control everything.

Just as each person has a shadow, according to Jungian theory, so do archetypal patterns, including the double. This bipolar phenomenon is not a bad thing, since the dialectical wrestling with both light and dark characteristics of the archetypal elements can alchemically generate a new synthesis of greater consciousness and more resilient centeredness in a person, spurring enhanced self-development. In describing what he terms the *competitor* motif of the double, Walker explains that "the negative archetype always contains the force of the positive, including the drive toward individuation."[34] From this perspective, it's important to recognize that the Sith are not merely "evil," the Jedi not only "good." For example, Obi-Wan's frequent condescending chiding of Anakin's youthful spunk has the effect of pushing away his young apprentice, who subsequently seeks validation from crafty Chancellor Palpatine, as shown in *Revenge of the Sith*. Only after their bond has disintegrated and they've become ferocious adversaries in a climactic lightsaber duel does Obi-Wan finally confess his limitations as a teacher, exclaiming: "I have failed you, Anakin, I have failed you!"[35]

Minutes later, Obi-Wan has achieved the tactical advantage and, with a single deft swoop of his lightsaber, cuts off Anakin's legs and one remaining biological arm. Reduced to a legless trunk with but a single mechanical arm, Anakin bellows: "*I hate you!*" Then Obi-Wan cries out: "*You were my*

brother, Anakin; I loved you."[36] What little remains of Anakin catches fire as Obi-Wan, distraught, walks away. For the first and only time in the film saga, love between two men is expressed overtly, yet it is only proclaimed in the past tense and occurs in the midst of vehement rage and grotesque violence. It seems to me that such an arrangement of interpersonal same-sex events has a strong homophobic tinge to it. At the same time, perhaps Obi-Wan's amorous declaration, albeit long overdue and horribly timed, foreshadows Anakin's eventual renewal.

At this juncture, Anakin's life is ironically saved by Darth Sidious, showing again how the Dark Side can have an essential role to play in moving the journey forward. The older Sith Lord now works a gruesome transmutation of Anakin's barely breathing carcass into the massive dark phallus that is Darth Vader. Anakin now completely identifies with his shadow, mutated into a high-tech version of Frankenstein's monster. But even here the embers of homosexual romance may be found, since, as Walker has discussed, the Frankenstein creature can be appreciated as a metaphoric embodiment of true love's ideal, the double soul figure, rendered externally hideous by the creator's projection of his own shadow of internalized homophobia.[37] As the story plays out, a son Darth Vader does not yet know he engendered with Padmé will breathe new life into those embers.

PHALLIC RECEPTIVITY: LUKE SKYWALKER'S SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF THE SHADOW

When viewers first meet Luke in *A New Hope*, he is completely ignorant concerning his birth father, believing himself a typical rural youth itching to get off his uncle's farm. However, a fateful sequence of events causes him to encounter "Old Ben" (Obi-Wan) Kenobi, who has been secretly watching over the boy since his birth. This quickly developing *mutual* bond of equivalent need offers Luke an adventure and purpose beyond his imagination while providing Obi-Wan with the opportunity to correct the mistakes he had made with Anakin. Obi-Wan's time while alive with Luke will be brief, but with the murder of Luke's aunt and uncle, his surrogate parents, Obi-Wan becomes the *primary* person in Luke's life, forming an affiliation at once *passionate* and *affectionate*, as shown in particular by Luke's acute grief after Obi-Wan sacrifices himself. This martyrdom demonstrates the *lifesaving* nature of their partnership, while we see the *transformative* and *transmissive* aspects of their alliance in how Obi-Wan swiftly turns Luke from a callow boy into a vigorous warrior capable of wielding the Force. Finally, their companionship is *enduring* and *transcendent*, in that, after death, Obi-Wan's sentient spirit stays close by Luke through almost his entire remaining journey. Luke will develop a similar attachment with Yoda, also making friends

with Han Solo and Princess Leia, though these last two relationships lack the transmissive and transcendent qualities explored above, giving them a more mundane quality.

In his interpretation of episodes IV–VI, Steven Galipeau rightly identifies Leia as symbolic of Luke's anima but fails to account for the lack of erotic allure that in Jungian psychology is considered a central feature of a primary soul figure.[38] In fact, Leia functions in the way anima often does for gay-identified men, as a sisterly guide toward amorous receptivity with other men rather than herself being the romantic ideal.[39] Thus, a man can be salutarily penetrated sexually and/or psychologically through the felt quality of a homosexually organized anima's openness. On the intrapsychic level, such receptivity is a critical ingredient to greater self-realization, as a homosexual man relaxes his defenses and expands his capacity via anima to take up intercourse with the unconscious psyche, as personified by the double soul figure. In the paradox of same-sex romance, a man can retain his phallic masculinity while simultaneously receiving penetrative energy. In this most intimate gay place, we discover that *all* great spiritual awakenings depend on such an internal homosexual dynamic.

Obi-Wan demonstrates this kind of *phallic receptivity* during his battle with Darth Vader in *A New Hope*, when he says, "If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine."[40] He gives a knowing last look at Luke and quickly enters a meditative state, gently smiling. Vader swings his lightsaber at Obi-Wan's now-defenseless body, which vanishes as the sword makes contact. Luke now telepathically hears the voice of Obi-Wan's spirit guiding his escape. Later, we learn that the elderly Jedi has successfully transitioned into a ghostly form, still present for Luke. Perhaps Obi-Wan has learned how to miraculously achieve such immortality from his nineteen years in singular exile "communing" with the spirit of his former master, Qui-Gon Jinn. As for Luke, he has not yet embodied this particular kind of emotional openness when he first encounters Darth Vader antagonistically in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and agonizingly discovers that the hateful villain is actually his own father.

To better understand this central paternal relationship from a Uranian psychoanalytic perspective, it may be helpful to appreciate how, according to revisions of Freudian oedipal theory by Walker and others, burgeoning libido in young proto-gay boys aged roughly four to six initially constellates its homosexual potential in relation to father (or closest father figure) as the first beloved.[41] The father's thwarting of his son's erotic advances (necessary but often exaggerated and cruel in our homophobic culture) leads to the refocusing of libido inward, spurring the coalescence of an inner twin "brother." As part of such a progression, the father image is not merely abandoned but incorporated into this newly crystallized double soul figure.[42]

The multi-layered, highly resonant interactions that transpire between Luke and Darth Vader draw their particularly piquant richness, I would suggest, from the incestuous homosexual libido that secretly propels their impassioned encounters. When Luke meets what turns out to be an imaginary Darth during his training with Yoda, Vader's helmet explodes open to reveal Luke's own face within; viewers are clued into their essential twinship nature, which contains both the warning about possible descent and identification with shadow, but also the hope for eventual redemption and fuller integration.

When Luke does actually challenge Darth at the climax of *The Empire Strikes Back*, Vader attempts to dominate Luke by "castrating" his hand with a lightsaber, then famously proclaims, "I am your father!" Luke's disgusted reaction seems to be caused by the realization that he was born from the seed of such an evil figure, but it may also be symptomatic of defenses against gay oedipal yearnings that have suddenly been strongly activated. That dark phallicism seductively calls out to him: "Luke, join me and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son!"

Although still adversaries for some time, the incestuous romantic longing between Vader and Luke has been awakened, as suggested by their newfound capacity to telepathically hear one another's thoughts and wishes. Luke will ultimately access this intense libidinal connection to save his father, himself, and the entire civilization.

Yet, Luke's psychological maturity remains a work in progress. Soon after Luke turns himself over to Vader and the Emperor, he finds himself newly enraged toward Darth as his urge to protect his sister from their predatory father activates. Stronger than before, it is now Luke who at the key moment "castrates" Vader's hand in oedipal retaliation. Yet Luke realizes that he must navigate a new path between violence and victimhood. He refuses to continue fighting, discarding his lightsaber and its destructive ability. Here it seems to me Luke has decisively taken better responsibility for his own capacity for aggression. While not directly psychologically minded, Luke has confronted and made a more conscious relationship with his shadow, empowering him to pull back the projection of his own hostility onto Vader, consequently opening him to feel how much his father, deep inside, still has the capacity to truly *love* his son. Luke is able to offer his own life in this moment of empathic realization because he has discovered an authentic moral center and encompassing wholeness through his practice of phallic receptivity, a completion of his mortal existence that would be a fitting end if death should then result.

Misreading Luke's even-greater new strength as pathetic foolishness, the Emperor is enflamed to lethally fry the young man with fierce blue lightning shooting from his fingers. This extreme act becomes a too-painful mirror for Vader in light of Luke's new compassion, and finally he sees into his

own shadow. The Emperor's unredeemable murderousness compels Vader, now bereft of old projections, to throw him down an open shaft. Suddenly freed from his thrall to the shadow, Vader regains his former identity as Anakin. His arduous odyssey has at long last come to a heroic finale, in the end rebalancing the Force.

Luke removes the black helmet and mask to reveal the loving face of his true father, fatally wounded but grateful that Luke has found the humanity buried within them both. After expiring, he appears to Luke as a spirit, in his original pre-Vader visage and form, side-by-side with the ghosts of Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi, three vivid aspects of Luke's double soul figure eternally present and loving. In turn, Luke can be the still-living youthful embodiment of soul for all three.

In looking back at the uniquely *passionate* encounter between Luke and Darth Vader/Anakin, we discover a viciously antagonistic conflict that ultimately becomes deeply *affectionate*. Despite a huge power differential when they first clash, Luke's increasing skill and maturing ethical stance brings them to a truly *mutual* communion. As all other relationships fade into the background, their struggle becomes *primary* for both men, even *enduring*, as their interaction extends beyond Anakin's death. This is clearly a *lifesaving* kinship, where Luke refuses to kill Darth Vader and then Vader/Anakin saves his son from the Emperor's wrath, two reciprocal actions that are also magnificently *transformative*. Vader regains his humanity, while Luke faces his own shadow and pioneers a masterful invocation of phallic receptivity, which actually provides a *transmissive* movement where Luke's willing self-sacrifice stimulates Anakin's long-dormant capacity for love. Lastly, we find the *transcendent* quality of their affiliation in how each man stretches beyond his personal resources to make critical moral decisions leading to the liberation of the society and their happy reunion after Anakin achieves immortality.

CONCLUSION: HOMOSEXUAL LOVE'S ASCENDENCY

The preceding analysis has examined same-sex partnerships in the *Star Wars* saga in large part by highlighting a consistent pattern of nine distinctive qualities that appear frequently in such intimate bonds. Same-sex dynamics in *Star Wars* are frequently *passionate*, *affectionate*, *mutual*, *primary*, *enduring*, *lifesaving*, *transformative*, *transmissive*, and *transcendent*. When most or all of these characteristics suitably describe a specific affiliation, they strongly evoke the double as soul figure, suggesting the presence of same-sex romance and its beneficial nature as engine of enlightenment.

While it feels valuable to identify subtextual homosexual themes in a popular work of mass entertainment that never shows any overt same-sex

romance or gay-identified characters, the fact that these erotic archetypal motifs must be analytically uncovered reveals a persistent heterosexism in the production of the films, portraying a galaxy in which homosexuality is still "the love that dare not speak its name."[43] Although George Lucas shows a refreshing critical attitude toward reckless heterosexual unions in his three prequel movies, he has also created a vast fictional civilization that has no overt presentations of gay love, suggesting a substantial failure of imagination for an opus otherwise so profusely inventive. As noted above, the one moment in the six-movie narrative when one man speaks the word *love* to another is in the midst of a dreadful battle in which Obi-Wan has just severed Anakin's legs and arm.

However, there *is* another sentient male *creature*, Jar Jar Binks, who *is* overtly expressive of affection, exclaiming soon after he meets Qui-Gon, "Oh mooee, mooee, I wuv you!"[44] While many fans reacted to what they saw to be a racist depiction, journalist Richard Goldstein has suggested that the particular vehemence toward Jar Jar by many is because they perceive him to be gay.[45] This goofy figure does indeed display numerous characteristics of the queeny comic relief historically common in Hollywood films, though Lucas does eventually give him better dignity in having him rise to the stature of legislator, adorned in a regal, floor-length robe.[46] Likewise, the other, more overtly "queer" comic character in the saga, C-3PO, is raised up in *Return of the Jedi* as a golden god by the Ewoks, suggesting a similar redemptive reverence.

These playful ennoblements of Jar Jar Binks and C-3PO feel rather small in relation to the gravitas of other personalities and events in the epic, and yet perhaps these two characters, and the more serious interpretative findings of this essay, augur well for a possible future where homosexual love can be fully honored on its own subjective terms.

Once their underlying qualities are amplified, same-sex partnerships in *Star Wars* can be seen as remarkable not just for their significant presence but how their deep soul dynamics *drive* the expansive narrative and envelop it with a numinous fey feeling-tone. All of these fecund involvements persist and culminate in Luke's heroic embodiment of his own phallic receptivity and the final overthrow of political totalitarianism.

It seems our own contemporary society, so dangerously fraught with large-scale violence and environmental degradation, may itself be in dire need of a fundamental metamorphosis, perhaps a *psychological* revolution not unlike Luke's journey, where each individual becomes swept up in the quest of same-sex procreativity as represented by the magical union of the archetypal twins, and consequently is drawn through initiations into alchemically integrating light and dark aspects of the greater Self into a better-realized, life-affirming wholeness. Such resplendent symbolic imagery of fulfilled homosexual personhood inspired by the double is hopefully still

early on in its intrapsychic and cultural ascendency, as it appears we have only just begun to appreciate same-sex love's profound purpose in the bigger scheme of things today.

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11

The War for *Star Wars*

Matt Singer

> The only reason [making movies] is fun is because I don't have to answer to anybody. I don't have anybody telling me what to do.
>
> George Lucas, *Charlie Rose*, 2004[1]

> Lucas stinks. He's a fraud! Let's overtake the ranch and rule it ourselves, after all, they're our movies right? Lucas didn't do anything, he wouldn't be anywhere without us, the fans!
>
> Wrath_Mania, Boards.TheForce.Net[2]

In 1973, 20th Century Fox saved a couple of thousand dollars and cost themselves countless billions.

At the time, twenty-nine-year-old George Lucas from Modesto, California, was the hottest director in Hollywood, thanks to the surprise success of his nostalgic film about small-town teenagers, *American Graffiti*. Even before *Graffiti* opened, Fox executive Alan Ladd Jr. was so convinced of the film's imminent success that he agreed to finance Lucas's next project on the basis of a short treatment. The treatment was for a space epic titled *The Star Wars*.

The initial arrangement, in the form of a seventeen-page deal memo, called for Lucas to earn $200,000 for producing, writing, and directing the film. But when it came time to sign the full contract for *Star Wars*, *American Graffiti* had already opened to enormous box office grosses, putting Lucas in prime position to renegotiate. His agent thought he could get a $500,000 raise plus gross profit points on *Star Wars*.[3] But Lucas had other plans.

"I was very careful to say 'I don't want more money, I don't want more points, I don't want anything financial, but I do want the right to

make sequels,'" Lucas would later say.[4] Lucas agreed to make *Star Wars* for his original salary in exchange for the sequel, merchandising, licensing, publishing, and soundtrack rights to the film. Fox, delighted they wouldn't have to pay a half a million dollars more for a risky project, quickly agreed. "The studio said, 'What do we care?'" Lucas later told the American Film Institute. "Licensing isn't worth anything—no one's been able to license anything. There's no money there. I was only doing it to get T-shirts and posters so I could promote the movie because I was afraid they weren't going to do it."[5] At the time, the rights Lucas fought for were thought to be so worthless they were nicknamed "garbage rights."[6]

One man's garbage is another's treasure. The rights to all those sequels—five in all so far, plus an animated film and several television spinoffs—and hundreds if not thousands of toys, books, comics, video games, memorabilia, lunchboxes, soap dishes, and who knows what else have earned hundreds of millions of dollars for Lucas, and turned his small company into one of the most powerful and influential in Hollywood.

Lucas is no psychic, much less a Jedi. He didn't want the rights because he knew they'd eventually be worth billions of dollars. He wanted them because he wanted *control*. Writing the script to *Star Wars* was a long and arduous process. After months of work, Lucas realized his space epic was getting a little too epic to fit into just one film. He decided to take just the first act of his massive screenplay, and expand *that* portion into its own film. Someday, though, Lucas wanted to make the other two-thirds into movies of their own, and he was concerned that if *Star Wars* wasn't a big enough hit, Fox would never let him do it. Speaking at an anniversary screening of *Star Wars* in 2007, Lucas told the audience that he had no idea *Star Wars* was going to be such a social phenomenon. In fact, all the choices he made were motivated by his belief that the film would *not* be a cultural juggernaut. "I thought it was going to lose money," Lucas said. "Everyone thinks I'm real smart, and I really wasn't. I was just simply trying to make sure that I was able to make all three films and that I wasn't going to have someone controlling what happened."[7]

For Lucas, long-term control was much more important than short-term cash. The story of the making of the *Star Wars* saga is the same story as the *Star Wars* saga itself: the search for power in the universe. Thanks to the millions and millions of dollars those "garbage rights" had brought Lucas by the time he made the three *Star Wars* prequels from 1999 to 2005, the filmmaker answered to no one. Lucas wasn't just an auteur; he was perhaps the most financially independent auteur in film history. He had the control, the power, and the money to do whatever he wanted.

What *Star Wars* fans wanted, was more *Star Wars* movies. After 1983's *Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*, the franchise was frozen in carbonite for more than fifteen years. But when Lucas finally returned to the series with 1999's

Episode I—The Phantom Menace, audiences weren't nearly as pleased with the results of Lucas's creative autonomy as the director himself. Some fans thought *The Phantom Menace* wasn't worth the wait, and they made their growing dissatisfaction known by making their own *Star Wars*–inspired art in response. By the end of the saga's final film, *Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*, *Star Wars* fans had written songs of hatred about George Lucas (like Hot Waffles' "George Lucas Raped Our Childhood") and made documentaries about how he'd systematically ruined everything that was good about his beloved franchise (like the 2010 film *The People Versus George Lucas*). These days, it seems like no one hates *Star Wars* quite like *Star Wars* fans.

So who owns *Star Wars*? George Lucas or the fans? Fox's billion-dollar mistake inadvertently created the most fascinating test case for the auteur theory of film in cinema history. Lucas told a story about the quest for control of a universe, and his fans interpreted its message as a call to arms. Ironically, Lucas was his own worst enemy: By getting exactly what he wanted, and then failing to satisfy his audience when he gave them exactly what they claimed *they* wanted, he built a film series that convinced an entitled fanbase—a veritable clone army of people who think exactly like Wrath_Mania—that they themselves were more qualified to act as its caretakers than its own creator.

Why is Lucas so obsessed with control of his movies? It's not an easy question to answer. Lucas isn't Charles Foster Kane; there's no Rosebud sled in his past that can instantly explain his unending need for absolute creative autonomy. The portrait of the man painted by Dale Pollock in his biography *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* instead suggests a filmmaker who always believed that he, as director, knew what was best for his movies. A series of minor scuffles with Hollywood strengthened his resolve that his was the only voice that mattered.

As early as his graduate school days at the University of Southern California, Lucas knew he liked to be in control of his work. As an assistant editor to Verna Fields, making educational films for the United States Information Agency, Lucas was infuriated when his bosses in the government altered his cuts. "I realized," Lucas told Pollock, "that I didn't want other people telling me how to cut a film. I wanted to decide."[8] When he received the opportunity to make a documentary about the production of the Columbia Pictures movie *McKenna's Gold*, he refused the producer's orders to simply create a generic piece of promotional fluff. Instead he made an experimental tone poem documentary called *6-18-67*. Fortunately for Lucas, his talent was evident enough in the final product to keep him out of trouble with his boss or his school.[9]

His desire to make every creative decision quickly became a compulsive need. During an apprenticeship at Warner Brothers, he struck up a friendship with another young up-and-coming filmmaker named Francis Ford

Coppola. With Coppola's support and backing, Lucas got to make two low-budget Hollywood features before he was thirty years old: the dystopian sci-fi picture *THX 1138* and the aforementioned *American Graffiti*. Though Coppola's presence ensured Lucas's creative autonomy on the set, the respective studios of *THX* and *Graffiti*, Warner Brothers and Universal, both imposed edits on the films before their theatrical release. Coppola believed that *THX* was "barely cut" by Warner but Lucas didn't see it that way.[10] He was incensed.

"The cuts didn't make the movie any better; they had absolutely no effect on the movie at all," he says in Pollock's book. "[*THX*] was a very personal kind of film, and I didn't think they had the right to come in and just arbitrarily chop it up at their own whim. I'm not really good with authority figures anyway, so I was completely outraged."[11] A filmmaker more willing to compromise or collaborate might simply be glad that he got his defiantly noncommercial film made at all, or that the changes "had absolutely no effect" on the finished product. After all, if the changes don't affect the movie at all, why worry about them? To Lucas, the minimal impact of the changes only made matters worse. Warners' edits were arbitrary and unnecessary. But more importantly, they challenged his position as the ultimate authority on the film.

Lucas had similar things to say a few years later, when Universal was similarly displeased with the director's cut of *American Graffiti* and had their in-house editors trim three scenes out of the film. Lucas openly acknowledges that the lost scenes were self-indulgent, but insists that a filmmaker "should be allowed a little self-indulgence, as long as it doesn't destroy the whole movie."[12] Note that Lucas isn't concerned with "hurting" the picture; hurting the picture a little to satisfy his own obsessive vision is okay, as long as the overall effectiveness remains intact, a theme that returns over and over in Lucas's life and career. Lucas's all-consuming need for control even extended to his corporate headquarters, Skywalker Ranch in West Marin, California, which Lucas designed himself from the ground up. Not only did he provide architects with detailed instructions, he even wrote a fictional history for each building. The main house supposedly dates back to 1869; the brook house was "added" in 1913.[13]

These negative experiences in Hollywood had a profound impact on Lucas. Pollock says that after *Graffiti*, the director "vowed never to give up control again. If his films did not reflect his vision, then he would rather not make them at all."[14] That led directly to the *Star Wars* deal that ensured him total control over the film's sequel and merchandising rights. Though Lucas populated the *Star Wars* universe with greedy bounty hunters like Boba Fett, money never motivated Lucas himself. As Lucas's attorney Tom Pollock puts it, "Every single deal we've done has been a trade-off of dollars for control, because that's what George has always wanted. The whole his-

tory of the *Star Wars* negotiations was dollars versus control."[15] When describing the opportunity to make the first *Star Wars* sequel, *Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*, in the 2004 documentary *Empire of Dreams*, Lucas said it "was the perfect opportunity to become independent of the Hollywood system. I didn't mind them releasing it, but it was really going to them for the money and them saying 'Well, I like the script but I want a change,' or 'The film is good but we want to make these changes.' That's the part I wanted to avoid."[16]

The only changes made would be by Lucas himself, and they would come later. Before he could change the films, though, he had to change how movies were made. Lucas's dream of complete control over his films—to transmit the exact ideas in his head to the silver screen—became the driving force behind the advances he has made in digital filmmaking. The special effects technology available to him at 20th Century Fox in the mid-1970s wasn't good enough to create his elaborate vision for *Star Wars*. So he founded his own company, Industrial Light and Magic, to build the props, sets, miniatures, models, makeup, matte paintings, and optical effects he needed. But while ILM quickly became the industry leader in special effects, their work had limits, too, which pushed Lucas to invest in computer technology. Computers' easily manipulated images represented the ultimate demonstration of Lucas's desire for total control over his movies. No need to fly to Tunisia to use it as a stand-in for the desert planet of Tatooine. Lucas could set up a green screen at Skywalker Ranch and have his effects artists digitally paint Tatooine into the background. With CGI, the only limits of *Star Wars* were the limits of Lucas's imagination.

In the supplemental documentaries available on the *Star Wars* prequel DVDs, you see Lucas happily manipulating raw footage to match his personal vision. If he preferred an actor's line reading in take six, but liked the framing in take eight, he'd digitally cut the actor out of take six and simply insert him into take eight, like a writer cutting and pasting a sentence from one paragraph to another. Even better for a director as notoriously uncomfortable with actors as Lucas (Harrison Ford memorably said that Lucas had only two directions for his actors: "OK, same thing, only better" and "faster, and more intense"), computers allowed him to create entirely digital actors whose performances were completely under his sole control and discretion.[17] Digital actors like Jar Jar Binks from *The Phantom Menace* require only keystrokes and mouse clicks as their motivation. Orson Welles famously said that the enemy of art was the absence of limitations. For George Lucas, the systematic effort to eliminate financial and technological limitations is the very essence of his art.

In any other line of work, George Lucas would be called a control freak. As a movie director, he's called a perfectionist. The six *Star Wars* films are many things: an homage to classic movie serials, a modern update of ancient

mythology, and a critique of man's over-reliance on technology (a critique that demands the most advanced computer technology to produce it). But perhaps most importantly, *Star Wars* represents the ultimate fantasy of a control freak. After all, what else is The Force but an aspirational manifestation of man's desire to control all that he sees through sheer "force" of will?

The Force gives Jedi Knights like Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi incredible fighting abilities with their lightsabers. But much more importantly, the Force also allows them telepathic control over their environment and even the people around them. As the older Obi-Wan first meets young Luke in *Episode IV—A New Hope*, he puts on a display of the Force's ability to influence the "weak-minded." When their speeder is stopped by some Imperial stormtroopers, Obi-Wan uses the Jedi mind trick to convince them they aren't the rebels they're looking for. Lucas wrote this scene in the immediate wake of his struggles with Universal over the final cut of *American Graffiti*, when the ability to bend your opponents to your demands with a simple wave of your hand must have been an incredibly appealing idea.

To Lucas, Hollywood represents the world's true phantom menace. Knowing his thirst for power, and his series' occupation with similar themes, it's easy to read the entire saga as a thinly veiled story about filmmaking: the Empire represents the rigidity, bureaucracy, and venality of the Hollywood establishment while the Rebel Alliance represents independent filmmakers on the fringes of popular culture. The Empire has the resources; the Rebels have the morality. The Rebels are portrayed as quirky, unique individuals: plucky Luke Skywalker, brash Han Solo, brave Princess Leia, cowardly C-3PO. Though they are able to work together to achieve common goals, they all look, think, and act differently. The Empire, in contrast, is defined by uniformity. Every stormtrooper wears an identical uniform. (We later learn in the three *Star Wars* prequels that the stormtroopers look exactly alike because they *are* exactly alike; the troopers are all clones of a single donor specimen.) Even Darth Vader hides his face behind a mask.

Sometimes the Empire moves comically slowly, a brutal satire of Hollywood's sluggish decision-making process. The very last shot we see of the Imperial forces on the Death Star in the seconds before Luke blows it up at the end of *A New Hope* is Peter Cushing's bureaucrat Grand Moff Tarkin lost in thought. The entire world is about to explode and he's totally oblivious, silently deliberating what his next move should be. Giving the green light, in the Empire as in Hollywood, happens very slowly. In *The Phantom Menace*, the major threat comes from the "Trade Federation" who "blockade" the "small planet" of Naboo. Replace "Trade Federation" with "major studios," "blockade" with "flood the market, pushing out," and "small planet" with "indie filmmakers" and the whole scenario could be an article in a trade publication like *Variety*.

The value treasured in *Star Wars* above all else is independence and self-reliance. At the end of *A New Hope*, the other Rebel pilots fail to blow up the Death Star with their spaceships' targeting computers. Luke succeeds by trusting in himself and in the Force; he turns off his targeting computer and fires his shot purely on instinct. Darth Vader's redemption at the end of *Return of the Jedi* is symbolized by the removal of his dehumanizing black armor, the reclamation of his human face and the rejection of his Imperial mask and its life-support systems.

Vader's quest for power directly parallels Lucas's. From the very beginning of his story, when he's a young slave named Anakin Skywalker, Vader is considered one of the most powerful of Jedi. In episode I, Qui-Gon Jinn declares that Anakin has the highest concentration of midi-chlorians, the microscopic organisms that give someone the ability to access the Force, he has ever seen. But that is not enough for Anakin. Like Lucas, he is never satisfied by what he has, and craves nothing less than total control over life and death in the *Star Wars* universe.

In *Episode II—Attack of the Clones*, Anakin has premonitions of his mother's death, and so he journeys to his home planet of Tatooine to find her. He rescues her from a band of evil Tusken Raiders, but just as he saves her, she succumbs to her injuries and dies. Cradling her body in his arms, Anakin says, "I wasn't strong enough to save you, Mom. But I promise: I won't fail again." Anakin's vow echoes Lucas's own after he decided that he would never let studio meddling ruin the release of one of his movies the way be believed their meddling had ruined the theatrical releases of *THX* and *American Graffiti*.

In *Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin's hunger for power consumes him and fuels his transformation into the villainous Sith Lord Darth Vader. Once again, he is haunted by visions; this time of his pregnant wife Padmé dying in childbirth. But Anakin's efforts to find the power he needs to save Padmé are repeatedly stymied; the Jedi Council refuses to grant him the rank of Master, which Anakin perceives as an insult to his talents and skills, an echo of Lucas's outrage at the disrespect he received from Hollywood executives who did not believe in him enough to release his preferred cut of his earlier films. Emperor Palpatine, hinting that it might grant him access to godlike powers, seduces Anakin to the Dark Side of the Force. Anakin makes a deal with the devilish Palpatine, and becomes his Sith apprentice. It's worth noting that the two words Palpatine screams during his confrontation with the heroic Jedi Mace Windu in *Revenge of the Sith* are "ABSOLUTE POWER!" Palpatine doesn't just sound like a Jedi who has embraced the Dark Side of the Force. He sounds like an egomaniacal film director.

Does Anakin Skywalker's fall from grace represent a self-critique on the part of Lucas? Is he acknowledging the corrosive effect his own pursuit of complete creative control might have had on his own career and his work?

Perhaps. *Empire of Dreams* concludes with Lucas identifying the parallels between himself and Vader. "What I was trying to do was stay independent so I could make the movies I wanted to make," he says. "But at the same time I was fighting the corporate system. . . . I found myself being the head of a corporation. So there's a certain irony there. I have become the very thing that I was trying to avoid. Which is basically part of what *Star Wars* is about. That is Darth Vader. He becomes the very thing he's trying to protect himself against. But at the same time, I feel good that I'm able to make my movies the way I want them to be."[18]

Though Lucas is drawing a clear parallel between himself and Vader, I'm not sure he sees the hypocritical nature of his own comments. He casts himself as Darth Vader, but he doesn't appear to fully recognize the dark nature of his own actions. He rationalizes the fact that he sold out his artistic ideals by claiming that the end justifies the means; he became what he hated to accomplish his goals, but in the end he made his films exactly the way he wanted to, so it all worked out. Imagine defending Darth Vader's actions the same way: "Sure, hundreds of Jedi died and the universe fell under the sway of a corrupt dictator, but at least Darth got the power he was after!" You won't find too many people who interpret *Star Wars* that way.

Though Anakin Skywalker is most concerned with controlling the future, Lucas's "garbage rights" meant he could do more than make new films; he could also remake the old ones to match his vision of the future. Lucas's desire to update the original trilogy of *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi* birthed the so-called Special Editions, and also signaled the first rift between the director and his legions of fans.

The Special Editions, released to theaters in 1997, improved the analog effects of the original films with digital enhancements that weren't available in the 1970s. Fans were receptive to the superior visuals, but they rejected many of the additional changes to plot and character. Perhaps the most infamous example is the controversy over the confrontation between Han Solo and the bounty hunter Greedo in *A New Hope*. In the original version of the scene from 1977, Greedo confronts Han at the cantina on Tatooine and holds him at gunpoint, but Han distracts him and shoots him with his own blaster before Greedo can fire. In the Special Edition, Greedo shoots before Han and misses him at point-blank range, and then Han returns fire.

It's a difference of one shot in a scene filled with dozens of shots in a movie filled with dozens of scenes. Casual viewers didn't even notice it. But for a small group of obsessives, Greedo firing first was tantamount to heresy. Disgruntled fans interviewed in *The People Versus George Lucas* describe the changes to this and other scenes as a "manipulation" and a "betrayal." Another even goes so far as to compare Lucas's reediting of his films to the act of Holocaust denial!

Howard Tayler, a writer and illustrator also interviewed in *The People Versus George Lucas*, bemoans the fact that the Special Editions "lie to us about these characters." Consider the implications of that sentence. How can a movie present an inaccurate view of its own subjects? Technically it can't; Han Solo is a work of fiction, and all we know about him for sure is what exists on the silver screen. Tayler's belief, echoed by many on the Internet, is that there is a "right" or "wrong" way to portray a character like Han Solo that is independent of whatever Lucas, that character's creator, thinks. Tayler is arguing for a power higher than that of the director; that of the fan-slash-expert.

Whether they realized it or not, hardcore fans like Tayler were challenging the very foundation of the auteur theory, the idea first introduced by French critics in the 1950s that films were the works of sole authors, namely their directors. Lucas had fought for and won the right to call *Star Wars* his exclusive and personal domain. On the original trilogy, he had ceded some control: Fox still held final cut over *Star Wars*; Irvin Kershner and Richard Marquand directed *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, respectively; Lawrence Kasdan cowrote the screenplays for the second and third films. By the prequel trilogy, Lucas has become the ultimate auteur: he wrote, directed, and financed those films almost entirely on his own. There was no one looking over Lucas's shoulder as he was making episodes I, II, and III. That was exactly how Lucas wanted it and exactly what fans hated.

While Lucas attained the creative autonomy he had fought his entire career to achieve, fans cited Lucas's independence as the reason for the flaws they perceived in the prequels' quality, from their mediocre dialogue to their convoluted storylines to their emphasis on special effects over character development. They argued that because Lucas rejected collaboration and distanced himself from his old creative partners (some of whom, like *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back* producer Gary Kurtz, believe he's become too focused on merchandising), he suffered as an artist as a result.[19]

In essence, the fans were arguing against the auteur theory. A singular creative voice isn't what makes films great; according to them, it's what ruins great films. Ironically, the man who believed so strongly in the idea of himself as an auteur that he struggled for years to ensure he receives absolutely no interference from any outside source has created the work that has become the basis for the most widespread repudiation of the auteur theory in cinema history.

On most film productions the director makes his decisions, and the crew works to fulfill his vision. In *Star Wars*, the director makes his decisions and the fans make their own, which they express in myriad ways: in short films, in fan fiction, in lengthy essays and critiques. One *Star Wars* fan named Mike J. Nichols was so disgusted with the official version of *The Phantom Menace* that he reedited the film and then released his cut online as *The*

Phantom Edit (he was so convinced he knew better than Lucas that he gave his version the tagline "See What Should Have Been"). A popular series of online video reviews about the *Star Wars* prequels by RedLetterMedia.com runs some four and a half total hours of analysis and critique—almost as long as the films themselves. George Lucas may claim that making movies is only fun for him now because he doesn't have to answer to anybody, but every decision he makes is scrutinized by thousands upon thousands of armchair critics. And they all have YouTube accounts.

Interestingly, their complaints about the Special Editions and the prequels are drenched in the same motivation that spurred Lucas to write *Star Wars* in the first place: nostalgia. Everything from *Star Wars*' episodic structure to its constant action beats to its simplistic morality tales of good versus evil were inspired by Lucas's childhood love of *Flash Gordon* comic books and old movie serials.[20] Much of *Star Wars*' appeal is owed to the fact that by tapping into his sense of nostalgia for his childhood, Lucas appealed to the sense of nostalgia all audiences have for their own childhoods. But when adults who grew up with the franchise watch *Star Wars* now, they're not reminiscing about the times they spent watching film serials like *Flash Gordon*; they're reminiscing about the times they spent watching films like *Star Wars*. But that only works if *Star Wars* makes them feel like kids when they watch it; changing the text, as Lucas did in the Special Editions, destroys that illusion and minimizes their pleasure. They could care less about Lucas's desire to push the medium of digital filmmaking forward or to fulfill his original vision. They were only concerned with *their* original vision, which was the way the film looked back in 1977. Lucas's growth as a technical filmmaker was getting in the way of their desperate attempts to stunt their own growth and remain in a state of perpetual adolescence.

So why do *Star Wars* fans treat this series so possessively? Though he doesn't deserve a lot of the outpouring of negativity he receives, the fans' behavior is largely Lucas's own fault. Fans act like they own *Star Wars* because since they were children they've been taught by George Lucas that they *can* own *Star Wars*. For decades, Lucas had strip-mined every last ounce of the franchise for revenue. No character is too minor to be turned into an action figure; no backstory mentioned in throwaway dialogue is too trivial to be turned into its own spinoff novel. For a *Star Wars* fan it can feel like there is a Force in the universe; an irresistible force of merchandising.

No movie series in history has been commodified as much as *Star Wars*. As a child I played with *Star Wars* action figures while wearing *Star Wars* pajamas, socks, and underwear on a bed covered in *Star Wars* bed sheets. A generation of children like myself weren't raised that *Star Wars* was a film; they were taught that *Star Wars* was an idea that they had invested in with their souls and their wallets. By purchasing collectibles, they were, in essence, purchasing stock. Everyone who's bought a light-up lightsaber or

an inflatable Darth Maul chair believes they are a shareholder in *Star Wars*. And shareholders expect some amount of control in the company they've invested in. No wonder then, that people who had given hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars to Lucas felt they owned *Star Wars* just as much as he did. Everything Lucas had as a result of *Star Wars* were things they had given to him on its behalf.

Unfortunately the "shareholders" in *Star Wars* do not get a vote in whether Han shot first or whether it's a good idea to see Boba Fett as a whiny, obnoxious kid. *Star Wars* is not a company; it's a product of a company, and a privately held company at that. You might even say it's controlled by an empire headed by one man: George Lucas. The worldview of these childish shareholders had been heavily influenced by a lifetime of watching *Star Wars*, a film series devoted to promoting the idea that the appropriate response to fascistic, dictatorial empire is rebellion. So the fans of *Star Wars* reacted much the same way the heroes of *Star Wars* did: by banding together to destroy imperialism with grassroots democracy.

Perceiving his company as an empire, they perceive Lucas as the Emperor—too strong, too blind to the needs of the people, and motivated only by self-interest and the desire for more and more power (let it be said that they may not be entirely off-base). That means they cast themselves as the Rebel Alliance, a small, underfunded, but passionate group of freedom fighters defending the territory they believe the Emperor has sullied with his sinister machinations. They respond with the tools that Lucas himself taught them; cinematic guerilla warfare. They disrespect Lucas's authority over *Star Wars*, just as he disrespected Warners' authority over *THX*, and make their own underground films, stories, and reviews, and share them all on the Internet. Rather than trying to find a place in the studio system, they found a way to make their own visions independently.

Once again, Lucas's own dreams come back to haunt him like a character in one of his movies. To help facilitate his cinematic visions, Lucas was one of the earliest pioneers of digital filmmaking technology. Decades later, digital technology put the tools to critique, insult, or flat-out mock Lucas into the hands of thousands of disgruntled *Star Wars* fans. Thanks in part to Lucas's own efforts, you didn't need millions of dollars and your own special effects company to make a convincing lightsaber duel. A couple of kids with some fight training and a decent computer could do it all by themselves. At least one fan film, *Ryan vs. Dorkman*, was so impressive that its star, director, and special effects designer, Ryan Wieber, got a job at LucasArts working on *Star Wars* videogames.[21]

Though they often make fair and accurate criticisms of the prequel trilogy, fans seem shockingly unaware of the hypocritical nature of their own comments, even as Lucas often seems unaware of the hypocritical nature of his. They expect it to shock and surprise them the way it did when they

were nine years old, then rage at Lucas when he dares to experiment with new technology and characters. They buy the toys and games and t-shirts then complain that *Star Wars* has become too commercial. They demand more sequels then complain that Lucas should get back to making original films like *THX* and *American Graffiti*. They demand more from *Star Wars* than other franchises, and hold it to an impossibly high standard of quality. No matter what Lucas does, he can't win with these people.

It's been a strange journey for George Lucas. His whole career has been about telling stories as a means to amass more power to tell stories, and the stories he chooses to tell with that power are about the means of amassing power. He became the most successful independent filmmaker of all time, created an army of fans, and angered them enough that they turned on him, using all of the techniques that he himself had pioneered against him. Still he keeps trying to please them, perhaps aware that his despotic control of *Star Wars* will only last as long as people continue to fund his ventures in its universe. If their interest dries up, so does his capital in Hollywood.

The relationships between teachers and students are vital to *Star Wars*; all Jedis, good or bad, have apprentices. Lucas's fans essentially assumed the role of his apprentices, taking the knowledge he imparted to them and using it against him, just as Darth Vader does against Obi-Wan in *A New Hope*. As Vader says just before his duel with Obi-Wan, the circle is now complete. When they first watched *Star Wars*, they were but the learners. Now *they* are the masters.

NOTES

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12

Defining the Jedi Order

Star Wars' Narrative and the Real World

Nick Jamilla

From the very first draft of *Star Wars*, it was clear that George Lucas made the Jedi Order a central element of his universe. Against this background Luke Skywalker came to understand his relationship to the universe, and it was his father who came to challenge the very existence of Jedi order. Their story, together with that of Lucas himself, had an impact not only on the narrative of the *Star Wars* saga, but also on the enterprises Lucas created to fill in this universe. Ultimately, it was Lucas's desire to impose order that tells as much about the Jedi as it does about Lucas himself.

THE JEDI MEME

In 1996, Lucas announced his decision to make three movies that would take place before the original trilogy, requiring that he retroactively create a narrative that believably linked a new prehistory to the first three films. Ret-conning, as this is known, had its risks because fans already had strong opinions of what a Jedi was. Fans welcomed the idea of finally getting to see the origins of the Jedi Order, but watching and accepting this pre–Star Wars universe was often difficult for die-hard fans who had imagined their own vision of the Jedi from what they remembered (and liked) of the original trilogy.

Lucas destroyed what fans remembered about the Jedi, however, when he began to redefine the Force in the prequels. Because these memories were so defined and consistent, the concept of the Jedi had become what Richard Dawkins calls a "meme" (rhymes with "dream"). The Jedi meme became a perceived cultural idea or behavior that spreads through society from person to person. And like a gene, which is subject to mutation and

variance, a meme can change, or evolve, and even become extinct if no one continues to perpetuate it through constant or regular transmission. This Jedi meme was created from the original trilogy and has evolved through the social interactions of *Star Wars* fans first through their experience standing physically together in line to watch (and re-watch) the original trilogy films, and then later through messaging, chatting, and blogging over the Internet about the Expanded Universe. The Jedi meme had evolved to such a state and was shared by so many people that it has even begun to challenge Lucas's own ideas of *Star Wars*, shaping the direction of the prequel trilogy as Lucas developed each script.

The Jedi Order meme was based originally on the powerful presence of Alec Guinness's Obi-Wan when he first met Luke on Tatooine: "For over a thousand generations the Jedi Knights were the guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic." Lucas created the Jedi Order by fiat. And as is the nature of institutions, it would spawn an organization that would be defined by the very concept of knighthood and a faint infusion of the marshals of the old West.

The Jedi meme would also be shaped by mentions in the *Star Wars* novelization of a "Dark Lord of the Sith," which Lucas always envisioned as a rival order of knights. Without much detail except a name and a role, *Star Wars* fans would eventually create a meme of the Sith that would continue until Lucas revealed Darth Maul in *Episode I—The Phantom Menace*.

But institutions like the Jedi Order—both in *Star Wars* and the real world—have, by their very nature, a powerful influence on the people who live and work within them, as well as other organizations that collaborate with (or compete against) them. Institutions establish order, organize ideas, codify beliefs and traditions. Literature, however, (and one must think of *Star Wars* as a literary work) celebrates the ability to challenge these massive organizations, which is, of course, the romanticism of the *Star Wars* story. Lucas's Jedi Order, much like Lucasfilm in the real world, eventually leads to a creation that takes a life of its own. Like the "monster" animated by Frankenstein, Lucas discovered that the *Star Wars* he had created did not always turn out to be what he had intended. The Jedi Order defined its own existence as it touched upon the world—a world where the Jedi Order meme began to evolve and change at a rapid pace as *Star Wars* fans began to discuss, debate, and redefine their understanding of the Jedi Knights.

What Lucas created was a unique character who was both a believable warrior and yet also a peacekeeper. The Jedi were like marshals of the American West whose jurisdiction was: anywhere. They were like the samurai found throughout society in medieval Japan. Their council sat in a circle like the table of King Arthur. And they were very much like the Lensmen of E. E. Smith's novels that Lucas read as a kid, who were galactic commandos who traveled through the universe.

Martial cultures found in martial institutions do not simply spring into existence, however. Martial institutions are a result of the experiences of the people who operate within the institution. And, by inference, one can assume the same for a fictional organization like the Jedi Order. But Lucas also wanted the Jedi to have a clear relation to the state—one founded on advising it, defending it, and even propping it up. This aspect as a civilian institution is worth noting.

JEDI ORDER AS A CIVILIAN INSTITUTION

At the beginning of episode I, the Jedi are on a mission to Naboo as diplomatic representatives. And as all diplomats learn at the beginning of their studies, the purpose of diplomacy is the attainment and maintenance of peace. In principle, a diplomat does not make policy though he is aware that he subtly shapes its outcome. And even if the diplomats do not agree with that policy, it is ingrained in their training that their role is ultimately one of maintaining their government's prestige and carrying out its policies with respect and skill in execution. It is a necessary outlook, as essential as the assumption of a lawyer that an individual is innocent until proven guilty. A diplomat may advise against a policy's implementation, but he may never refuse to carry out his orders without giving up the right and privilege of representing the home government. The remarkable thing about diplomats is their embodiment of a foreign government with its wealth of culture, economic power, and military might behind him. The diplomat does not come with any protection save that of the reputation of his master. Indeed, governments today separate military representatives from diplomatic representatives not only because of their specialized sphere of competence, but also to prevent the melding of two competing interests in the same individual. The diplomat who could wage war was something a sovereign (like Chancellor Palpatine) would fear.

What makes a Jedi different from a mere diplomat was the fact that he could defend himself without the need of an army, or the protection of his host. A historical comparison might be that of a Spartan ambassador to the Athenian Assembly. Such representation would assuredly be a capable warrior on the one hand (as all Spartiates were), as well as an influential and important representative on the other. But spheres of competence and spheres of action are difficult concepts to grasp, especially when it refers to the Jedi, who are seen much more as lightsaber fighters than diplomats. It is helpful, then, to go to three basic concepts in Roman law that illustrate the nature of Jedi and the scope of their actions: *auctoritas*, *potestas*, and *imperium*.

Auctoritas, translated as authority, refers to the ability of a person or group of persons to compel another into a certain behavior without recourse to physical threat. This ability to compel is not easily accomplished and relies quite a bit on the listener to respect this authority willingly. It is the reason why the driver of a Ferrari would let a police officer give him a speeding ticket and then later pay it. In episode I, Qui-Gon Jinn says to a battle droid on Naboo, "I am ambassador for the Supreme Chancellor and I am taking these people to Coruscant."

Potestas—power—refers to the specific ability to use force to make someone comply with one's words. It is a limited kind of power—usually that of an individual who is permitted to physically move, control, or subdue a potential (or actual) lawbreaker using whatever tools (or personnel) that are available to him. It is the reason why a police officer, with a drawn weapon, can command someone to raise his hands and surrender. The power of *potestas* also allows Mace Windu and his three Jedi (a posse) to approach Chancellor Palpatine and apprehend him at the point of a lightsaber. "You're under arrest, my lord," Mace says to a disarmed chancellor suspected of colluding with Separatists against the very office Palpatine is sworn to defend.

And yet *potestas* is an extremely limited ability that is contrasted with the concept of *imperium*—the use of extreme and massive force; the waging of war. "I cannot fight a war for you, Your Highness. I can only protect you," Qui-Gon says to Queen Amidala. Translation: I do not have *imperium*, I only have *potestas*. Of course, one subplot of the prequel trilogy is the legalese used to legitimize Palpatine's powers in a way that the Senate and the people of the universe would accept it. And, once given, it is the reason why Yoda, under the *auctoritas* of the Chancellor, could take charge of the clone troops being raised on Kamino. The clone troops were, in effect, Yoda's posse sent to save his hopelessly outnumbered and out-skilled comrades.

By the end of episode II, the Jedi were no longer diplomats or negotiators. In fact, their relevance as effective peacekeepers was called into question at Geonosis. Yet Lucas manages to underscore the importance of the individual when Yoda ignites his lightsaber and defeats Count Dooku. *Star Wars* is very much about individual action in a seemingly uncontrollable universe. Lucas's own life parallels this when, like Yoda, after the hard battle of making *Star Wars*, Lucas would find himself in charge of a vast army at Lucasfilm to do his bidding.

LUCAS: MASTER OF THE JEDI

We should remember that no one expected *Star Wars* to be a hit. Lucas was constantly frustrated by not having the funds to make the movie exactly the

way he envisioned. The British production crews yawned at the crazy science fiction production. And even when the movie started to take off, critics simply lauded it as a fun summer blockbuster, but certainly not a major cultural influence. Fans, however, were ecstatic, and when it was clear by the following year that *Star Wars* had become a worldwide phenomenon, Lucas set out to give them a sequel that he hoped would be the beginning of a long career that would eventually allow him to make independent, nontraditional films.

As an outsider, it is always easy to look at the *Star Wars* phenomenon as a function of one individual and his vision of it. Lucas is the face of *Star Wars*. He's also its heart as well as its CEO. Lucas has taken all of these roles seriously.

It is almost a joke not to say that what Lucas does not want to control, he leaves to others. And where these key individuals work to fulfill Lucas's vision, they continue their contribution with an almost religious reverence. On the other side, those who do not continue to see Lucas's vision as their own tend to depart quietly, politely, without any mention of the differences that led them to move past Lucasfilm, or perhaps past *Star Wars* altogether. Even in parting, former Lucas employees do not bite the hand that once fed them. The pantheon includes such illustrious names as Dave Prowse, John Dykstra, Gary Kurtz, Doug Chiang, and even Lucas's former wife, Marcia Lucas.

Lucas's former colleagues have never described him as a "control freak." Rather, they emphasize creative differences. In fact, many forty-something *Star Wars* fans who experienced *Star Wars* in their preteens offer the idea that Lucas's collaborators helped make the original trilogy more compelling while a Lucas surrounded by yes-men allowed the prequels to become a complete showcase of special effects. Internet babble aside, there are two examples that illustrate the order Lucas sought to impose on his creations; the first involves the Expanded Universe, and the second concerns his relationship with Joseph Campbell.

Always, for the general audience, the pièce de résistance of Lucasfilm for the general public is *Star Wars*, especially in what has come to be known as the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe (EU), which ran quite independently from Lucas while he pursued his other creative and economic ventures. Some of them, like the *Star Wars Holiday Special* and *Howard the Duck*, were iconic failures. But because of the success of *Return of the Jedi*, Lucas realized that audiences still wanted *Star Wars* even though he no longer had the energy to do subsequent films. So he permitted other writers to enter his universe to contribute their own *Star Wars* adventures, and it was always the narrative that continued to pull audiences back to *Star Wars*.

Timothy Zahn's Thrawn trilogy, which takes place after the events of *Return of the Jedi*, was so successful that further literary explorations were

explored, including stories about Han Solo, Boba Fett, x-wing pilots, and a host of others. New characters were created, like Xixor in the *Shadows of the Empire* multimedia tie-in that was touted as a movie without a movie. Lucas relinquished control of the EU to Lucas Licensing, which managed and cataloged the storyline, but he also limited the scope of their creativity in order to permit himself the chance to take back the toys that he had let others play with. There was one caveat: no explanations or details could be made about the Jedi Order or about the key characters and development of Obi-Wan, Anakin, and the Emperor.[1]

Star Wars remained a vast sandbox writers were willing to play in because it was a childhood dream for many to write in the *Star Wars* universe, and it drew huge audiences to their own backlist of novels. Under the management of Sue Rostoni at Lucas Licensing, Bantam Books, Del Rey, and later Lucasbooks publishing houses vetted and managed all story outlines. By 1993, fans had long since put away ideas of further *Star Wars* films and lived off the growing library of *Star Wars* novels. Then Lucas shocked the world by announcing that he was going to rerelease the three *Star Wars* films as special editions that would include minor narrative changes and additional footage.

Though the general audience would be slow to react, serious fans now lived in a world of the Internet where influential bloggers or webmasters could chime in on what Lucas was doing to the franchise. Fans have always "played" in the *Star Wars* universe and Lucasfilm has tried to protect its copyright. They went to court to prevent the U.S. government from using the term "*Star Wars*" to refer to the U.S. anti-missile defense system, and later they tried to squash the many forms of fanfiction, including the sexually explicit slashfiction (Google it!). Lucas has since learned to let others create their own *Star Wars* fiction, and even their own films, referring to their creations as works of the "Holy Ghost."[2] Fans had their own creative outlet, so long as they did not make money from it.

Now Lucas was not only releasing the first three films in the theater for the first time since their original release, he was also revising the three films by adding additional footage that reflected an expanding vision. Convinced that digital technology had matured after seeing the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* (whose digital effects his company ILM had created), Lucas was testing the waters to see how popular *Star Wars* remained. If reaction were tepid, he could continue as he always had, letting the EU expand. Naturally, *Star Wars* was a phenomenal success, giving twenty-somethings and younger an opportunity they had never had growing up on *Star Wars*—the opportunity to see these films on the big screen. Not surprisingly, Lucas would announce his intention to make the prequels.

The academic world considered these special editions a bombshell because they called into question the very nature of art on a scale that affected

millions of fans around the planet. Sure, writers since the invention of writing had changed text in subsequent iterations, but these changes were generally corrections. Lucas not only added enhancements (or dalliances in personal indulgence to some), but he subtly changed the narrative to fit a new vision of his story. One notorious example was the fact that Han no longer shot Greedo first, revising the ethical (unethical) character of Han Solo that everyone had come to love for his roguish qualities. No one considered Han a murderer because he was held at gunpoint by an alien who was already prepared to kill him. But visually altering the scene by painting in new blaster bolts called attention to Lucas's own insecurities about Han, and his willingness to alter the *Star Wars* meme. For *Star Wars* fans, however, this wasn't like changing the words in a book in which a reader imagined the whole world. Lucas had actually changed what they had seen, which, for many, was tantamount to changing what they had experienced.

Lucas was nonplussed, having already begun to change the perception of *Star Wars*, accreting the imprimatur of academia by embracing Joseph Campbell and his concepts of the monomyth—a far cry from the 1977 *Rolling Stone* article in which Lucas compares *Star Wars* to "that stupid serial fantasy life that we used to believe in," and contrasts it with science fiction that had become "pious and serious." Lucas later embraces a mythic (literally!) quality to the original trilogy. No longer does Lucas talk about the literary importance of comics in society ("Uncle Scrooge swimming around in that money bin is a key to our culture [laughs].")[3] Now *Star Wars* is a modern-day myth.

Lucas has always taken his work seriously. Especially after the success of *Star Wars*, he was genuinely surprised that he wasn't being panned for writing a children's tale. In fact, he called his story a "children's narrative," but fifteen years after *Return of the Jedi*, he has begun to take *Star Wars very* seriously. In the 1999 *Time* article with Bill Moyers, Lucas said, "With *Star Wars*, I consciously set about to re-create myths and the classic mythological motifs."[4] Lucas now felt that *Star Wars* had so great an impact on society that it now apparently influenced how we, the people of Earth, viewed ourselves. Instead of it serving as a romantic and adventurous inspiration, his films had come to define the perceptions of who we were as a civilization; what our origins were; and what our shared destiny was. Collaborator academics like Mary Henderson from the National Air and Space Museum, or Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis from Doubleday, or Bill Moyers were happy to spread the mantra that *Star Wars* was a modern myth.

In reality, however, while *Star Wars* might have been "mythic" (adjective), the narrative of *Star Wars* on popular culture was technically (and simply) "epic." Perhaps *Star Wars* would become truly mythic if the story were told to children as if it were real, as in Christian Bale's and Gerard Butler's *Star Wars* reenactment in the film *Reign of Fire*. The revisionist assertion

that *Star Wars* was a modern myth is as specious as saying that evolution never happened. One cannot change the facts simply by repeating a falsehood repeatedly. Lucas influences the lives of many people on earth, but let us leave *Star Wars*' influence as one on pop culture, and not one on the very foundations of contemporary civilization.

JEDI MARTIAL AND RELIGIOUS CULTURE

From the very beginning of *Star Wars*, the most lasting impression is a universe in turmoil, first with stormtroopers attacking rebel soldiers, and then the revelation of powerful knights who lived under a martial code. Singlehandedly, Lucas revived the romantic notion of military adventures after a period in American history when war had come to be synonymous with all that was wrong with the U.S. political system. Lucas's Jedi were not the modern soldiers of present-day armies; they were exceptional individuals more akin to the demi-gods of the Greek traditions, individuals who were half-god in their powers and abilities, but essentially human in their mortality. The Jedi of Lucas's universe had the political standing of warriors between the ruling class and the ordinary people, and they had an ethical aspect that placed them as actual defenders of good in service of justice and the proper authority of a galactic government.

The organization of the Jedi Order along military lines created particular intrinsic goals. Again, like all institutions, the Jedi Order seeks to preserve the competence and skills that are required of its members. There must be military training, including the lightsaber and its practice. Still, apart from this, the Jedi institution served as a repository of military skills and techniques that were associated with the art of warfare.

On film, Jedi powers have a visual substance, but they are, in effect, of very limited martial scope and serve more to enhance lightsaber combat than to displace it altogether.[5] This is done on purpose in order to preserve the preeminence of the lightsaber duel, rather than replacing it by "super" powers. Even the so-called magician's duel at the beginning of the Yoda-Dooku fight eases the audience into the implausible idea that Yoda was capable of wielding a lightsaber effectively.[6] Telekinesis was used occasionally to throw objects or to regain a lost lightsaber, but this was never done at the expense of eliminating actual lightsaber combat, which is the *Star Wars* saga's most iconic image.

Throughout the saga, Expanded Universe writers have attempted to elaborate on Jedi customs. Often, with limited or little guidance, these writers have had to extrapolate and expand on mere mentions or simple references from the original three films. The most significant institutional reference within the Jedi Order is an accounting of the Jedi Trials. The Dagobah scene

is ostensibly a Jedi challenge that is a cinematic artifice metaphorically challenging Luke with the Dark Side of the Force. It had a physical aspect in the form of the lightsaber exchange, but the convention was designed to mirror perceptions and events that Luke would later confront. Here was a challenge that Luke failed when he defied Yoda's instruction to leave his lightsaber.

The prequels make quick reference to the Jedi Trials. The *Jedi Path* student guidebook published in 2010 attempts to give specific details of the trials, which are divided into tests of skill, courage, spirit, flesh, and insight.[7] However, this literal creation is more representative of the humanity test from *Dune*, wherein a "nerve induction" box causes pain in order to demonstrate the threshold of pain an individual can endure, proving his ability to rise above the animal instinct to sacrifice the hand.[8] A civilized society would consider such a test a form of torture, as impractical as having to kill someone as a rite of passage into knighthood.

For an institution like the Jedi, a credibility threshold must support the in-universe fact that Jedi become the commanding officers of the clone troops. Troops can be nominally placed in charge of certain units or military groups, but the loyalty and authority of a superior officer is something different from the actual acceptance of authority by noncommissioned troops. Lower ranks are the principal body of what will eventually become the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), with a network of officers (the Jedi) as its nervous system carrying out orders of the command structure. This is where the Jedi share a common experience with its clone troops. Each follows a physical regimen where training involves individual and group practice; what better example could a Jedi be to his followers if he could best a clone in hand-to-hand combat without the use of the Force. Indeed, the difference between personal combat (*duellum*) and warfare (*bellum*) is typified in the nature of each militant. While each defines a sphere of combat—one limited, the other broad—the two aspects of conflict demonstrate opposite sides of the same coin. The Jedi has a role in each. In the real world, the Jedi would be the graduates of elite military academies like Sandhurst, Saint-Cyr, or West Point.

One final aspect about the Jedi Order's central importance focuses on its relation to the Galactic Republic as a fundamental bastion for civilization, making the Jedi virtually synonymous with a representative government. Matthew Stover first introduced this theme in his novel *Shatterpoint* in which Mace Windu had to find and save his former Padawan on his home planet of Haroon Kal. Mace sees the Jedi Order as the critical juncture (a shatterpoint) of the Republic, without which the progress and order of the galactic civilization is at stake. No other institution compared to the Republic as a shining example of stability, peace, and justice out of which the Republic was long ago formed. Lucas endorsed this raison d'être for the Jedi Order when he approved Stover's manuscript for the

novelization of *Revenge of the Sith* line by line. This certainly underscores the indispensable role the Jedi Order plays in the eventual downfall of the Republic.

Yet the Jedi must be seen as a religious as well as a military order. This congruence has a real and palpable value and is not so obvious to people in contemporary countries who live in relatively or completely peaceful societies. The scope and regularity of confronting death on the battlefield had grave repercussions on the way knights lived. Their calling as soldiers meant the possibility of death any time they were on a battlefield. Indeed, it was for this very reason that the military duel became an important marker for medieval and Renaissance societies because it defined manhood as a choice between cowardice and honor—true honor specifically involving the possibility of death, else it would simply be a game with rules. Once soldiers come off the battlefield, however, they must be constrained by codes of conduct. For the Jedi, as it was for military orders, regulations were imposed to govern the use of arms in civilian situations. For the religious knight like the Templar (and therefore inferred for the Jedi as well), life off the battlefield was also preoccupied with a religious formation and practice that prepared and consoled the individual knight in his trade of killing or being killed. Religious training for the knight was preparation for death.

A clear enunciation of the Jedi religious belief was stated during the duel between Obi-Wan and Darth Vader on the Death Star in episode IV: "If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine."[9] The implication, quite vague until the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*, is that there assuredly is something greater than this existence. Certainly the disappearance of Obi-Wan's corporeal body is confounding to Vader, but the nature of the ghostly apparitions of Obi-Wan in successive films was still not clear to fans, forcing Lucas to ret-con how Qui-Gon Jinn taught Yoda to preserve his identity, who in turn taught Obi-Wan how to do it. This still did not define the ultimate purpose of the Force as "becoming one" with it, but as vague as the Force was in the original trilogy, it remained rather obscure even after Lucas's subsequent declarations on the Force's nature.

The clarity of this philosophy is, ironically, misunderstood because it is Lucas himself, who speaks of dualities—good-evil, God-Satan, yin-yang—without understanding the philosophical implications of each. Good generally refers to selfless behaviors that benefit the individual and/or others—to use Lucas's vocabulary, "love" and "compassion." Evil is simply the opposite of good. Lucas describes the Dark Side of the Force as negative emotions: "fear," "anger," "aggression."

Each dualism, however, has a particular scope and they cannot be intermingled philosophically. God, for Christians, is an ultimate being, while Satan, biblically speaking, is a fallen angel who opposed God. The yin-yang

of Taoism refers to a view of a balance in nature—to a kind of natural order. Lucas's attempt to explain the Force through dualistic ideas betrays the religio-philosophical concepts that have long and separate traditions. Using Taoist vocabulary of light and dark while referring to the good-evil/God-Satan philosophical tradition is nonsensical to a student of theology.

Once Lucas defined the Force, however, certain religious and philosophical characteristics had to be inferred. The vague energy out of which all beings are created can appear mystical and fluid when it is not encumbered by definitions or limitations. The ethereal Force as a mystical energy seemed believable enough to audiences in the original trilogy, but concepts like a living and unifying Force, midi-chlorians, and the chosen one prophecy delimit the meaning of the Force. This consequently limits our acceptance of it, especially when these new definitions limit the Jedi to a genetic few.

The difficulty clearly lies in the verbiage in the prequel trilogy that confuses audiences because it logically sounds like one thing yet means another. Obi-Wan and Yoda spoke of a Light Side, using characteristics like controlling, knowledge, a guiding action; and a Dark Side as anger, fear, aggression, quicker, seductive. It portrayed the Force as two separate things—a light and dark—as though they were two separate and equal halves of a single concept.

Metaphorically, however, the Force as Lucas defines it (and now shown in the three-part Mortis episodes of the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* animated series), the true state of the universe is one of light—a state of goodness. In contrast, the Dark Side of the Force is a shadow that represents a dimming of light, something that obscures a universe properly shown under light. The balance of the Force is a state in which light prevails while the obscurity of the Dark Side is a disease and pestilence that destroys the world. One should not think of the Dark Side as one-half in the balance of the Force, which implies an equal amount of dark and a similar amount light. Rather, the Dark Side is an imbalance, an unnatural state that requires the infusing of something to counter the imbalance and restore the natural (and good) state of the universe. Clearly, Lucas had not fully developed his ideas of the Force in the first *Star Wars* film, and its development evolved as each script was written.

This failure to present the Force more clearly was a literary one. While art is generally lauded in its subtlety of meaning and interpretation, Lucas tried very hard to enunciate what he meant about the "balance of the Force" after the debut of each movie because people kept asking for clarification. Lucas certainly had an idea of what he intends by the light side, but audiences generally interpreted the meaning of the Force very literally. The visual aspect of film reinforces the idea that what one sees is what actually happens, as if the unfolding drama were documentary footage. When dreamlike scenes are present, it is up to the audience to interpret them. Again, literalism is an easy fallback for those with undeveloped literary skills. The scenes of

Luke's encounter with "Vader" in the Dagobah cave or the visions Anakin sees on Coruscant had to be seen within the context of the entire story. On the Mortis asteroid of the animated series, Anakin walks on a world that quickly changes between light and darkness. In this three-episode story arc, Anakin must make a choice of which side of the Force he should embrace. He could care and love or he could desire and control. Carried to an extreme, this denial of selflessness is ultimately called evil, with its beginning steps in attachment until they become all-consuming and selfish such that any concern for the well-being of others is extirpated. Wealth accumulates, one's world enriches, and power and privilege change his outlook so that the ordinary life of people is obscured. For Lucas, people start out good because the Force is essentially goodness. It is energy—good energy. To use energy for evil becomes a moral choice that goes against the nature of the Force.

The novelization of Revenge of the Sith refers to eternal life: "The ultimate goal of the Sith, yet they can never achieve it; it comes only by the release of self, not the exultation of self. It comes through compassion, not greed. Love is the answer to the darkness."[10] In early times, the Tao referred to a path of life that maximized *ki* (energy of the universe) in order to live longer. In the prequels, Lucas further defined the Force as a religion that asserted an afterlife that was attainable if one followed a particular morality; one aspect of this was that the Force had a sway on the ethics of human (and alien) existence. If one trusted in the Force, a person could better target a proton torpedo and destroy the Death Star or realize that one's father remains a truly good if recalcitrant person. It was an anti-technology message that gave emotional control to a guiding force in the universe. People were essentially good. The universe was good. And with cooperation, the Force would allow a symbiosis between things and creatures in the universe.

Both trilogies focused on choices. For Luke, the choice was whether to follow his dreams, which grew in significance as he discovered he had the ability to affect change in the universe. Luke first desired to escape the humdrum of a farmer's life, and he was finally given the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of his father, who was a legendary Jedi Knight. Even with the death of his aunt and uncle, Luke still had a choice of whether to follow Obi-Wan Kenobi. Obi-Wan could not coerce Luke, who had to discover and accept a way of life that took him farther than simply escaping Tatooine. Not only did he uncover a deep secret in his family, he had to commit himself to Yoda in order to learn the ways of the Jedi Knights. Anakin, too, had to choose his destiny and embrace a path that took him to Coruscant. He had to learn to submit himself to something greater than himself—something in the service of others, the same way Luke had to remain with the Rebel Alliance in order to destroy the Death Star.

But Luke was a new hope. Anakin was the chosen one, his very title enshrining the choice in front of him—a person who would bring balance

to the Force. And like all prophecies, its interpretation was imprecise and vague, making prediction or fulfillment something of a guess for believers. Much like Oedipus, who only discovered his incest in spite of his attempts to avoid it, Obi-Wan confronts Anakin as being someone "who would bring balance to the Force, not leave it in darkness." Indeed, Anakin would be the perpetrator of this imbalance. Others, like Obi-Wan and Yoda, admitted their culpability in their failure to rein in Anakin, but this is more a lament than a true acceptance of responsibility for the choices that Anakin made for himself.

Once again, the narrative of the individual who challenged (and destroyed) the very institutions of the *Star Wars* universe presents itself, and Lucas tries to enunciate the ultimate goal of the Force in the prequel trilogy. The meaning of Obi-Wan's statement that he would become more powerful than Vader could ever imagine is explained in the final moments of episode III when Qui-Gon Jinn appears to Yoda and offers to teach him the path to immortality. The prequel trilogy becomes a ret-con to explain why Anakin, Yoda, and Obi-Wan appear in a shimmering likeness at the end of the saga. Consciousness is something that is discovered through the religion of the Force. Qui-Gon's ghost at the end of episode III says, "It cannot be granted; it can only be taught."[11]

While the scripts and novelizations of the *Star Wars* saga indicate a limit to the ethereal appearances of Jedi, the saga seems to suggest from the very beginning that this ethereal, shimmering existence is the ultimate end. Going back to the original film, the thematic heart of the saga was present when Darth Vader killed Obi-Wan. Ostensibly, the Sith are the iconic nemesis of any comic book story. And as Luke's story involves a family secret, the Sith, too, are an extension of a Jedi family who were long ago expelled from the Jedi Order. Like Satan as a fallen angel in the narrative of the Jewish bible, the story of the Jedi Order is really an internal story of conflict between brother(hood)s. The narrative of the Sith could have easily been removed by making Anakin more intelligent and clever, but, in contrast, it is Luke who remains a Christological character, choosing sacrifice over power and control. Ultimately, this is why Lucas had to ret-con his original trilogy, instead of choosing the easier path of telling a tale of Luke and the Rebellion. He had already recounted the purpose of the Jedi Knight in *Return of the Jedi*. Its purpose was partially religious, which mandates that *Star Wars* is in great part a morality play.

LUCAS'S LEGACY

"The Story Comes First" was the headline of an interview with Lucas in the 1999 *Star Wars Insider* magazine.[12] For Lucas, who has always admitted that

he did not love writing, this was his biggest challenge. Like the Jedi Order from which certain martial ideas and characteristics about the Jedi spring, the vast organization Lucas created waited on his personal marching orders. Yes, in one of his DVD commentaries, Lucas bemoans the fact that he has become the emperor of his own empire, but Lucas is a lone voice that can alter the very fabric of the universe he has created. He had the right to make those changes. He had the *auctoritas*, but he did not have the *potestas* to make the audience believe what he wanted. His changes about the nature of the Force and the Jedi are not only a choice, but also a privilege, considering how much pleasure and joy he has brought to his fans with every *Star Wars* film he produced.

It is easy for outsiders, both professional journalists and the general fan, to look at Lucas and see the array of departments and ancillary companies at his disposal as the head of a vast single-minded conglomerate—but what most people forget is that there is a buoyant creative energy in the business of making movies. Especially since episode III, however, it has become de rigueur to fault the king for creating a kingdom that his greatest fans love to criticize. It's akin to faulting the price of an entry ticket into the theme park a person has been dreaming of visiting since he was a kid. But this cynicism stems from the historical order in which the films were made and not in the way they were meant to be presented. Instead of the refined message that we all can be Jedi like Luke, *Star Wars* comes off as a moneymaking-focused, gratuitously action-packed franchise. Neither a student of the sword, nor a Jedi Knight, would be so quick to judge.

Lucas was caught in a difficult temporal position because he created a world people came to love; then he had to flesh out that world that fans had created in their own mind. It was worse than a reader having to submit the mental images he or she had created from the hours and days of reading a book to a film adaptation. The imprint of watching *Star Wars* five, twenty, or a hundred times had a fantastic impact on the psychological memory of the film; this was repeated for *The Empire Strikes Back*, and then for *Return of the Jedi*. The shared visual experience was global, and for some fans, the meme for the original *Star Wars* trilogy became monolithic. When the prequel films did not equal their imagined creation of the Jedi Order, they would be the loudest to protest.

Lucas gave us the impetus for a shared meme of *Star Wars* at the completion of *Return of the Jedi*, but then he recast his vision by redefining that meme with each of the prequel films. Especially, when a certain number of midi-chlorians in a person's blood defined the Force, the shared Jedi meme went through a fundamental collapse. No more was the Force an ethereal essence available to anyone who would put away his computer and listen to the pulse of the universe. Once episode I was finally released, Lucas could not simply ret-con details about the Force out of existence (even ret-cons

have a weight in and of themselves); he could only ignore them in subsequent films. Each step forward regarding the Force was essentially a step back from its development, and the growing action of each prequel film became more and more the focus of the trilogy. The unifying and living Force made its philosophical appearance only once in episode I, as did the concept of symbiosis. The meme of Boba Fett exploded in people's faces when he turned out to be a wussy ankle nipper. And Anakin, first as a child, then as the adult, turned out to be a whiny, recalcitrant brat who didn't believe as much in the Force as he did in himself. Why else would he kneel before an evil mastermind without so much as a blink of an eye? There was his immediate dispatch by Obi-Wan with a single sweep of his lightsaber; and then the audience did not even get the satisfaction of seeing it. Gillard had proffered his own ending, scrapped when Spielberg suggested to Lucas that Anakin leap through the air during those final moments.[13] Another blow to the collective and individual meme.

But as traumatic as this is to our sensibilities, what prevails is the story of an individual who is able to challenge and defeat the great institutions that are seemingly indestructible. In the narrative of the saga, it was Anakin who destroyed both the Jedi temple and its "templars" so that Luke might one day rediscover—in fact, redefine—the Jedi in its absolute essence as the ultimate act of compassion—a willingness to sacrifice himself for others. From a narrative point of view, Lucas had no other choice than to explore (and define) the institution that would eventually bring out such an astounding discovery. How could one know what the Jedi *was*, without eventually knowing what it *wasn't*? It was not their buildings, or their allegiance, or their comic-book powers that made the Jedi compelling; Luke discovered the Jedi heart when he realized that redemption was possible in even those who had committed the universe's most unimaginable acts.

Going back to the influence of Japanese culture on the young Lucas, this is the "heart" of the samurai of which modern Japanese martial arts instructors speak. They call this *kokoro*. Translated simply as "heart," its full meaning is lost until one considers that the Japanese embrace the heart, soul, and intellect in the central location of the body called *kokoro*. Much like the Force in *Star Wars*, *kokoro* refers to those things in a person that are good, positive, and just. And like the student of the martial arts, we, the audience, have a choice to make when we try to understand and influence the *Star Wars* meme. We can be the bratty Anakin who looked at the world with distrust, or we can be Luke, who was grateful for all that he learned from his instructors.

Lucas named Luke Skywalker after himself, and when we look at the scope of his entire life, it is hard to deny that Lucas has not achieved a similar kind of triumph as Luke. He has not only had a tremendous effect on popular culture, but he altered the direction of filmmaking altogether.

Lucas, as CEO of his company, has also made choices in his relationship with the people who work for him. They have competitive salaries, on-site childcare, organic food cafeterias, health benefits for non-married partners, and no discrimination for sexual orientation. It isn't the perfect company, but that does not mean that Lucasfilm is therefore evil.[14] According to their recruiting page: "We're in the business of telling great stories and making magic."[15] Lucas did not destroy the Hollywood studio system, but he did serve as the first example of a director who could create his own independent studio house, in effect creating his own production empire. It is a pity that the word "empire" has such negative connotations when used in the context of Lucas's commercial enterprises. Yet Lucasfilm, like the story of Lucas's Jedi Order, remains a human one, which in turn means that it is not perfect.

Imagine one day ninety-five years after the death of Lucas when *Star Wars* moves into the public domain.[16] There will be a frenzy to remake his classic. *Star Wars* might very well maintain a shelf life through Lucas's heirs if only because ILM has become a chief part of the special effects of many large-scale film productions. However, whatever the eventual tale of Lucas's business, it will not be the neat narrative of the *Star Wars* saga. Lucas's personal tale, however, will be that of an individual who wanted the freedom to make films the way he wanted, even if that changed (or even destroyed) the meme his fans had of his personal creations. Lucas's own empire, like the Jedi Order in its three forms (political, military, religious), will seek to institutionally maintain its existence, but the final story of *Star Wars* will be one of individuals who challenged the status quo and dared to make a mark on the universe. And while the Jedi Order may remain a meme in modern civilization, it will be the story of individuals who defined Lucas's legacy. To parallel Leia's statement in the prologue of the *Star Wars* novelization: Lucas was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Naturally, he became the hero.

NOTES

1. "Do Not Talk about the Past. You may not discuss anything of galactic significance which occurs prior to *Star Wars: A New Hope*. This includes subjects such as the Clone Wars, specifics about the Old Republic, how the Emperor rose to power, how the Rebellion stole the x-wing prototype, the fall of the Republic, the extermination of the Jedi Knights, the history of Emperor Palpatine or Darth Vader, the Mandalorians or anything about the history of the Jedi Knights." Chapter Three: "Writing in the *Star Wars* Universe," *Star Wars Style Guide* version 2.0 (Honesdale, PA: WestEnd Games, August 1994), 12.

2. Lucas was the "father," the EU was the "Son," and the fans were the "holy ghost." Christian Taylor, interviewed by Geoff Boucher, "'*Star Wars*: *The Clone Wars*'

Head Writer Talks about George Lucas, Religion, and the Show's Lifespan," *LA Times*, March 19, 2011, http://herocomplex.latimes.com/2011/03/19/star-wars-the-clone-wars-head-writer-talks-about-george-lucas-religion-and-the-shows-lifespan, accessed April 7, 2011.

3. George Lucas, interviewed by Paul Scanlon, "The Force behind *Star Wars*," *Rolling Stone*, May 7, 1977, http://starwarz.multiply.com/journal, accessed June 9, 2011.

4. George Lucas, interview by Bill Moyers, "Of Myth and Men," *Time*, April 29, 1999, 89.

5. Gillard tried to de-emphasize Jedi Force powers in his choreography. Gillard speaking at Jedi Fighting Masterclass #1, CombatCon in Las Vegas, Nevada, June 24, 2011.

6. Rob Coleman, "Crouching Yoda, Hidden Dooku," *Star Wars Insider* 61 (September/October 2002): 69.

7. Daniel Wallace, *Jedi Path* (Bellevue, WA: Becker and Mayer, 2010), 96–109.

8. Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Ace Books, 1965), 8–10.

9. Alan Dean Foster's text of Obi-Wan's statement to Vader is even more descriptive: "If my blade finds its mark, you will cease to exist. But if you cut me down, I will only become more powerful." George Lucas, *Star Wars* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), 168.

10. Matthew Stover, *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* (New York: Del Rey, 2005), 409.

11. Ibid.

12. Scott Chernoff, "The Story Comes First," *Star Wars Insider* 52 (2000): 26.

13. Gillard, speaking at Jedi Fighting Masterclass #1, CombatCon.

14. Google "Lucasfilm" and "litigation" for legal problems.

15. "Welcome Page," Lucasfilm recruiting, July 5, 2011, jobs.lucasfilm.com/welcome.html.

16. Ironically, because of U.S. copyright law, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) will become public domain 25 years earlier than *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*. The 1998 congressional statute established the "life + 95 years" to movies created between 1923 and 1977. Movies created in 1978 and later go into public domain 70 years after the death of the creator.

13

The Empire Strikes Back

Deeper and Darker

Andrew Gordon

In retrospect, *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back* is the best of the six films in the *Star Wars* saga. Like its immediate predecessor *Star Wars: Episode VI—A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back* evokes what Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* called "the monomyth," portraying the mythic hero's Departure, Initiation, and Return.[1] In *Empire*, however, George Lucas and his cowriters deepen and darken the vision of *A New Hope*: The heroes are in retreat, and Luke Skywalker's identity and manhood are shaken. Although both films deal with the primal anxieties often portrayed in myth and fairy tale, *Empire* is not as reassuring as *New Hope* because it brings those anxieties closer to the surface without satisfactorily resolving them.

I have argued that the fundamental appeal of Lucas's saga lies in its deliberately old-fashioned plot, which borrows from many genres of American popular fantasy and is unified by the structure of "the monomyth."[2] The *Star Wars* saga recounts the adventures of a mythic hero in terms comprehensible to a contemporary, mass audience. It is fine popular art, all flashy surface, a blend of stunning, fast-moving visuals and pounding music whose primary impact is visceral. In addition, the mythic framework unifies the action, and those deeper levels are there if one cares to consider them.

Empire, the continuation of Lucas's epic saga, reiterates Campbell's mythic round of Departure, Initiation, and Return. The hero, Luke Skywalker, symbolically dies and is reborn on the ice planet of Hoth, then wanders lost in the dark wood of the swamp planet of Dagobah until he is enlightened by the Jedi master, Yoda, who teaches the inscrutable ways of "the Force" (a kind of Zen filtered through pop psychology). In the climax, Luke is wounded in an apocalyptic battle with arch-villain Darth Vader

on the Cloud City of Bespin. All three environments—the frozen, polar landscape; the dark, fetid swamp planet; and the soaring city hanging in the heavens—are beautifully realized, with a scrupulous attention to color and detail. The Cloud City, with its graceful, lofty chambers flooded with sunshine and rose shades, its art deco glass—as well as its dark, menacing inner rooms—rivals the Emerald City of Oz.

In *Empire*, however, Lucas and co-scriptwriters Leigh Brackett and Larry Kasdan have deepened and darkened the vision of *A New Hope*. As Lucas says, *Empire* is like

> the second act of a three-act play. As with most second acts, it deals with the problems of the characters. . . . [T]hey grow and evolve, and things don't go very well for them. The story doesn't really end; it doesn't have a super-climax. Another difference is in the attitude of the films. In the first one the mood is joyous and triumphant, exciting and funny, all at the same time. The second one is exciting and funny too, but it's also sad; it's more of a tragedy than a triumph.[3]

Empire is a rousing adventure story that is also genuinely disturbing. The heroes are in retreat from beginning to end; they accomplish only minor victories and suffer major defeats, reversing the pattern of the previous film. At the end of *New Hope*, Luke believes himself to be following in the path of his deceased father, a noble Jedi Knight. Ben Kenobi has passed on to Luke the totem of manhood, Luke's father's lightsaber, and Luke has proved himself worthy by defeating the evil Darth Vader and destroying the Death Star. But at the end of *Empire*, Luke's identity and manhood have been shaken by the loss of his lightsaber and his right hand to Vader and by the shocking discovery that the arch-villain is his long-lost father.

What makes *Empire* disturbing is not only the mutilation (a symbolic castration) of the hero, but the fact that the concealed oedipal meanings of the myth are made manifest. We realize now that Luke has been battling all along to kill his own father. The deliberate suggestion of "Death Father" in the name "Darth Vader" becomes transparently clear. The struggle to find his identity inevitably involves a mythic hero in patricide. Luke is the prophesied hero who will kill the King, a sort of clean-cut, corn-fed, adolescent Oedipus feared by both Vader and the Emperor.

Gary Kurtz, original producer of the series, says of *Empire*, "It's a story of him [Luke] growing up further. . . . Luke's confrontation with Darth Vader is probably the most important element. *Empire* is a rites of passage film."[4] All myths and fairy tales involve rites of passage, as does *Star Wars*. The difference is that *Empire* stresses the price of independence from the parents, the pain caused by the necessary death of the old self in the course of initiation.

In *Empire*, the young hero's secure identity is turned topsy-turvy. This upheaval is suggested by numerous episodes in which Luke is literally upside down. First, near the beginning, he is hung by his heels in a frozen cave by a snow monster; second, Yoda instructs Luke to use the Force by having him balance on his hands while levitating objects (Luke keeps losing his balance and toppling); and finally, near the end of the film, after his defeat by Vader, he is once again upside down, hanging on for his life from the bottom of Cloud City.

Darth Vader, as Gerald Clarke notes, "is far more menacing in *Empire* than he was in *Star Wars*. . . . With Vader dominating, perhaps even more than Lucas intended, *The Empire* finishes on a less satisfying and more ambiguous note."[5] Vader is by now clearly Satanic: once noble but fallen from grace, a betrayer of his former master, a villain who wants to rule the universe and who tempts the hero with promises of infinite power. He strides through the action like a source of demonic energy, as unstoppable as the id. The protracted, climactic battle between Luke and Vader is more brutal than anything in *New Hope*. It begins in the hellish, fiery-red carbon-freezing chamber, and leads ever downward, deeper and darker into the bowels of Cloud City, until it reaches the pitch of Gothic nightmare.

Near the end of the sci-fi film *Forbidden Planet* (1956), we discover that the invisible creature killing the Earth colonists on the planet Altair IV is actually a creation of the mind of Dr. Morbius. Morbius stumbled upon the superscience of the Krel (a dead race that once inhabited the planet), not only increasing the power of his mind but also unwittingly unleashing a destructive "Monster from the Id." These same monsters, incredibly enhanced and released from the mind, had destroyed the former inhabitants of the planet and now threaten to exterminate all the human colonists. The mental science of the Krel is equivalent to what Lucas calls "the Force," a power that can be used for either good or evil. Darth Vader, the representative of the Dark Side of the Force, is Luke's father, but on another level he also represents Luke's own potential for evil, his own "Monster from the Id."

Empire suggests this intimate connection between Luke and Vader. First, Yoda tells Ben that Luke has "much anger in him, like his father." Later, Yoda asks Luke to abandon his weapons and enter a cave that is strong with the Dark Side of the Force. Luke asks him, "What's in there?" Yoda replies, "Only what you take with you." Luke disregards the advice and enters the cave armed with his lightsaber. There he encounters and decapitates a vision of Darth Vader, only to see Vader's helmet dissolve to reveal—Luke's face. What Luke battles in the cave, then, is his own hatred and violence (which cannot be defeated with more hatred), his Darth Vader, his dark side—in other words, himself. Vader is not only, as we later learn, Luke's

father, but also what Luke could become if he gave in to the temptation of the Dark Side of the Force.

Irvin Kershner, director of *Empire*, said that in preparing for the film he read everything he could about fairy tales, beginning with "Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*."[6] Bettelheim claims that fairy tales are a voyage into the unconscious. The monster in such tales represents "the monster a child knows best and is more concerned with: the monster he feels or fears himself to be, and which also sometimes persecutes him." Fairy tales "give these anxieties form and body and also show ways to overcome these monsters."[7] The victory in fairy tales is "not over others but over oneself and over villainy (mainly one's own, which is projected as the hero's antagonist)."[8] What such stories demonstrate is "the ego's conquering the dark forces of the id."[9] In *Empire* the Dark Side predominates; having unleashed those forces, Lucas has not yet shown how they may be controlled. That task is left for the conclusion of the trilogy, *Return of the Jedi*. Our unease over the ambiguous conclusion of *Empire* is tempered only by the awareness that fairy tales have happy endings.

One way in which *Empire* deflects our anxiety over Luke's fate is by further developing Han Solo and plunging him into more peril. The film is structured by parallel action: while Luke, accompanied by R2-D2, undergoes his initiation on Dagobah, Solo, Leia, Chewbacca, and C-3PO flee the Empire's pursuing ships into an asteroid belt. The two plot lines converge in the climax on Cloud City.

Thus *Empire* is an epic with not one but two heroes, who are, in a sense, brother figures. Bettelheim mentions a series of fairy tales that feature the motif of two brothers who undergo separate adventures. The brothers usually stand for "incompatible aspects" of the human personality: "the striving for independence and self-assertion, and the opposite tendency, to remain safely home, tied to the parents."[10] Thus Solo acts out Luke's antisocial desires for total independence. Solo is always torn between being for himself and being for the group. At the end of *A New Hope*, he seems about to leave with his reward money; instead, he returns to rescue Luke. At the beginning of *Empire*, Solo is once again about to leave to pay off his debt to Jabba; once more, he sticks around to rescue Luke and later Leia.

Similarly, while Luke seems to regard Leia as a mother figure, Solo woos her passionately. (One notices in *Empire* the red lights flashing in the background whenever Solo and Leia confront each other.)

Throughout *Empire*, Solo suffers on Luke's behalf. First, he risks his life to rescue Luke on the ice planet of Hoth. Next, he performs the job that Luke should be doing by protecting Leia in the escape from the Imperial assault. While Luke gets safely away to Dagobah, Imperial ships pursue Solo. Finally, Solo is tortured and subjected to a kind of living death in the carbon-freezing chamber. Vader uses him as bait to trap Luke; Vader also

puts Solo into hibernation to test the process intended later for Luke. As a brother hero, Solo expresses some of Luke's repressed tendencies and suffers the punishment for these tendencies.

Empire, like all myths or fairy tales, deals with primal anxieties. In their parallel adventures, Luke and Solo both face a basic, fairy-tale danger: the fear of being eaten alive. First, Luke is hung like a side of beef in a frozen-food locker by the ice creature, who one presumes is saving him as a snack. Next, Solo slits the belly of the dead Tauntaun and shoves Luke inside to preserve him from the cold. (This is perhaps not so much being eaten as returning to the womb; right after this episode, Luke is healed by submersion in a bath resembling amniotic fluid.) Later, R2-D2, who as Luke's faithful companion is another extension of Luke, is swallowed and comically spit out by a swamp creature on Dagobah; evidently the serpent finds him unpalatable. Meanwhile, Solo and his group take refuge by flying the *Millennium Falcon* into a cave on an asteroid. But the cave is alive, and they escape at the last moment from the rapidly closing jaws and monstrous teeth of a gigantic space slug. Finally, the chamber in which Vader meditates on his ship resembles an enormous jaw with clenching metal teeth. Both Ben and Yoda warn Luke that the Dark Side can "consume" you if you are not careful.

Empire also plays on an anxiety related to the fear of being eaten: the fear of being dismembered. Stormtroopers dismantle C-3PO into a heap of junk metal and later Chewbacca partially reassembles him. Luke decapitates his hallucination in the cave, and, in the climax of the film, loses his right hand to Vader's lightsaber. However, in each case the fear of dismemberment is allayed: Both R2-D2 and C-3PO lost parts in the first film and had them replaced, and the plight of the disassembled C-3PO in *Empire* starts out pathetic but turns comic. Luke at the end becomes part machine (like his father), outfitted with a bionic hand indistinguishable from the original.

Aside from the fears of being eaten or mutilated, *Empire* also exploits the fear of suffocation. Darth Vader still wheezes asthmatically. As in *New Hope*, his preferred method of punishing rebels or insubordinate underlings is strangulation. Even Chewbacca tries to strangle Lando Calrissian after Lando betrays them.

Last of all, the film plays on the fear of falling. Luke crash-lands twice, and later he overcomes Vader's Faustian temptation by plunging into an abyss, a long fall through Cloud City that he miraculously survives.

It is possible that all these seemingly disparate fears—of being swallowed or dismembered, of suffocating or falling—are related to a more primal anxiety. *Empire* is a rite-of-passage film, and initiation rituals serve as a passage to manhood by symbolically tempting and defying castration, like the circumcision rites of primitive tribes.[11] According to standard psychoanalytic theory, "anxiety over being eaten . . . may be a disguise for castration

anxiety."[12] And "sometimes a manifest fear of suffocation covers a repressed idea of castration."[13] Furthermore,

> falling from a high place, connoting the danger of being killed, certainly represents punishment, probably most often punishment for wishes of killing; however, the sensation of falling itself simultaneously represents the sensations of sexual excitement which, having been blocked in their natural course, have acquired a painful and frightening character.[14]

In other words, considering the overt oedipal conflict in *Empire*, which climaxes with the hero's being mutilated when he tries to kill his own father, it makes sense that there should be so many frightening episodes that arouse and allay fears of emasculation. Even Han Solo's ship repeatedly fails to go into warp drive at crucial moments: it suffers a kind of mechanical impotence!

Another possible explanation for the primal anxieties evoked by the film is that they represent the fear of being abandoned by the mother, which may coexist with oedipal anxiety. There is nothing startling about such an interpretation. As *Empire* director Irvin Kershner says, "I feel that a film for children has to have certain qualities that children fear—like the fear of abandonment, the fear of being totally alone, the fear that maybe your parents aren't your parents. All kinds of basic fears: that's the root stock that feeds all fairy tales."[15] Throughout most of the film, Leia, who has served as a mother figure, abandons Luke and now is away, romanced by another man. When he is hanging on in despair to the bottom of Cloud City after Vader wounds him, he cries out for help to Ben and Leia, his substitute parents. Leia telepathically hears Luke's cry and forces Lando to turn the *Millennium Falcon* around and rescue him (only in the next film, *Return of the Jedi*, do we learn that Leia is Luke's twin sister, which explains the telepathic connection).

If we look further at the psychological significance of the various perils in the movie, we find that "the longing to be rejoined with an object to which one had yielded one's omnipotence . . . is unconsciously thought of as a kind of being eaten by a larger, more powerful object; it depends on individual circumstances whether this idea is met with positive longing or with anxiety."[16] That is, the fear of being eaten alive can be connected to the longing to return to the womb, as in the episode where Luke is stuffed into the belly of a beast.

Bettelheim points out that fairy tales serve as psychological reassurance for their hearers. Because children fear many of their own fantasies, "learning that others have the same or similar fantasies makes us feel that we are a part of humanity, and allays our fear that having such destructive ideas has put us beyond the common pale."[17] The comforting appeal of fairy tales is amplified by the widescreen, shared experience of the *Star Wars* saga. At-

tendance at the *Star Wars* movies is largely a group phenomenon; viewing them alone doesn't work as well. The producer Gary Kurtz says,

> Our plots might play well on TV but you just can't give a TV audience that "theatre experience"; the group environment and the widescreen and soundtrack effects. That's one of the reasons that people went to see *Star Wars* so many times. They wanted that experience. One seven year old wrote me saying he liked "living with these people in the theatre for two hours." He wanted to do it over and over again. You can't do that on television.[18]

Just as children love to hear their favorite fairy tales recited over and over again, so audiences both young and old returned repeatedly to *New Hope* for the reassurance of group participation in shared, widescreen fantasy.

Empire, like *New Hope*, deals with the primal anxieties raised by standard mythic and fairy-tale material. Both films overcome anxiety to some extent by distancing the fantasies in a world long ago and far away, by using prototypical characters, by comic relief, and by offering the implicit fairy-tale reassurance that everything will come right in the end. Nevertheless, *Empire* is by no means as reassuring a spectacle as *New Hope*, because it brings those anxieties nearer to the surface (where they may become too close for comfort) without satisfactorily resolving them. For that reason, although it is in many ways a more accomplished film, it was not as beloved by audiences as *New Hope*.

NOTES

1. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: World, 1956).
2. See Andrew Gordon, "*Star Wars*: A Myth for Our Time," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 6 (1978): 314–26; Andrew Gordon, "*Return of the Jedi*: The End of the Myth," *Film Criticism* 8, no. 2 (1984): 45–54; Andrew Gordon, "The Power of the Force: Sex in the *Star Wars* Trilogy," in *Eros in the Mind's Eye: Sexuality and the Fantastic in Art and Film*, ed. Donald Palumbo (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 193–207.
3. "An Afterword from George Lucas," *Mediascene Prevue* 41, no. 2 (July/August 1980): 47.
4. Ed Naha, "The Making of an Empire," *Future Life* 20 (August 1980): 69.
5. Gerald Clarke, review of *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Time*, May 19, 1980, 68.
6. Jim Steranko, "Exclusive Interview with Director Irvin Kershner," *Mediascene Prevue* 41, no. 2 (July/August 1980), 33.
7. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 120.
8. Ibid., 127–28.
9. Ibid., 121.
10. Ibid., 90, 91.

11. See Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male, Revised Edition* (New York: Collier, 1962).
12. Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), 200.
13. Ibid., 250.
14. Ibid., 197.
15. Steranko,"Interview with Irvin Kershner," 31.
16. Fenichel, *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, 64.
17. Bettelheim, *Uses of Enchantment*, 122.
18. Naha, "Making of an Empire," 70.

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